

ROOTS AND STARS

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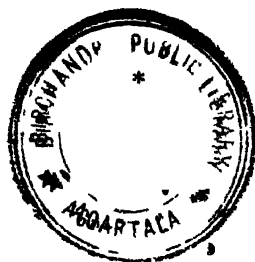


The author in her twenties seen in her
Cornish bog-garden



REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST

C. C. Vyryan



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ROOTS AND STARS

(Reflections on the Past)

In an attempt to tell the story of any human life there is a certain balance to be kept, for every one of us, whether that one be hero, villain or nonentity, is destined to grow roots and to gaze at stars. Slowly, slowly, as we leave childhood behind us, the roots of habit and conviction, taste and laughter are formed, helping us to stand as best we can, against the winds of chance, but for guidance and inspiration in our secret life we must look toward the stars that remain for ever beyond our reach, like those visions that the artist never can express and those dreams that the sleeper never can recall.

We grow down, striking root in the fabric of daily life and our growing confidence is patent to all observers but it is in our solitary moments that we look upward to the stars. Perhaps once in a lifetime we may overhear the morning stars when they sing together, or perhaps we may spend all our life following one particular star with faith and hope, as the Magi followed that Star in the East.

So we stretch out and away from our own beginnings, reaching down and up. Yet we always say 'up and down', as if we knew sub-consciously that 'up' should come first. Some discover early, and others late, that the purpose of growing roots is not only to confront destiny, it is also to afford balance for looking up toward the sky. A daisy could teach us that, but when we are children we are not ready to learn from daisies, we only play about with them as equals and plant them in our gardens and weave them into perishable chains. Later, perhaps, we learn that each one is a miracle, and then, lo! and behold, a daisy has become a star.

Dedicated to
Daphne du Maurier

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CHAPTER I

: CHILDHOOD :

A child, with no experience of star-gazing, is walking on the left side of her capable, Victorian, unlovable governess, an elder sister walks on the right side. The sister is clear-eyed and plain-spoken, she will always accept what each day and hour may bring, but the younger child is given to moods of brooding and to hiding her secret thoughts and imaginings.

Sometimes their daily walk would take them across that waste land of deserted tin and copper mines where many broken chimneys, still attached to a single, hump-shouldered building, stood up against the sky. The tracks in that treeless country were exciting because they were rough and narrow and criss-crossed one another and led nowhere in particular; they were bordered by stunted heather, for no other green thing would grow in that wilderness of mineral fragments and they were strewn with stones of many strange colours. It was a wild place where anything might happen.

Sometimes, however, the walk would only take them up Trebolin hill and down again, along a road confined by high earth hedges and this was always a dull, empty, 'there-and-back-again' walk, for those hedges were like 'don'ts', they kept you away from things that you wanted. It could have been so much better to walk in a semi-circle because in a semi-circle there is always hope of meeting something new and strange.

On this particular day they were walking along the main road to Peiran-ar-worthal, a road where, half way up a short hill, there was a hollow in the hedge just large enough to hold a sheep. It was a damp place with green mosses on the side and soft earth at the bottom where water seeped away into the gutter. This hollow was, the child felt sure, the home of 'Dwarfie', though neither the governess nor the elder sister knew anything about his existence. She herself knew very little, only that Dwarfie lived beyond the

range of her everyday world which merely held one day just like another, with always the 'don'ts' and 'mustn'ts' of the elders like walls about one, and always the level surface of the sister's mind that was never ruffled by feelings of wonder or sudden enthusiasm, and always the pressure, like something hard and cold against one's body, of the unlovable governess.

Dwarfie had no exact form, indeed if she were ever to meet him face to face she might not recognize him, he was probably about three feet high and rather square and many of his habits were unknown but he stood for the wildness of escape and living one's own life in one's own way and he had nothing to do with main roads although his domicile was actually beside one. Probably he had many other homes as well as this particular hole in the hedge and certainly he had the freedom of the fields and unknown country beyond those hedges that always hemmed one in, and certainly he could roam over the whole world without ever returning the same way. Possibly he could even fly. Very likely he spent most of his nights out of doors with the stars for company.

He was very far removed from the life of every day with its steady walks and dreary lessons learned while sitting opposite a governess with no light in her eyes and never a smile on her lips, with its misery of cut nails on Saturday nights always scraping against the sheets and of clean rough woollen stockings on Sunday mornings.

There was another walk that took us through a hamlet to a road where fir woods stood on either side. The trees had been planted on mine dumps and between their roots there were only naked stones. The road was lined by unfriendly stone hedges with never a gate in them, but the woods, although not very large, seemed to offer a perfect place for escape. I would plan to save my crusts of bread for many days and then I would leave home at night and hide among those trees and when the hue and cry was over I would explore the wide world; but at that point the day-dream became rather blurred, for I did not know where I wanted to go nor what I expected to find when I issued from that wood, crustless and alone, to wander in unknown countries.

Time after time I looked at those fir-trees and dreamed that

dream but there was never a chance to leap over one of the stone hedges and examine the wood, for the governess, using her umbrella as a walking stick and stumping forward with inexorable purpose, would permit of no diversion nor loitering, as she made for the milestone near Ting-Tang and then turned homeward.

Such longings for escape, such impulses to lead a life that would be new and wild and strange, were only the gropings of a childish mind towards freedom. I had no idea as yet of what I was looking for, only a dim notion that certain things, such as the solitude of that deserted mining country, the mysterious existence of Dwarfie in complete independence of human neighbours, the darkness of those untrodden fir woods were all connected with this search for something precious that was far away outside my life of routine. I had as yet no inkling nor foreboding that all through life I would be searching for physical and spiritual freedom and that already my intimacy with certain wild forms and places was quietly linking itself with the search.

All this was only half formulated in the mind of a rather dumb and obstinate child, walking between a cold governess and a well-behaved sister, on one monotonous walk after another, with only a faint hope that life would one day open out into something different.

Yet already I loved wild flowers and had many intimate friends among them, liked squirrels and birds better than cats and dogs, and felt a strange affinity with outbreaks of temper in the cook and in other familiars, with enthusiasm, excitement, unfenced country, gales of wind, the village idiot and all peculiar people.

From the age of eight to sixteen the thought of physical freedom, so persistently denied to us by the governess, was my bright particular star, but my sister did not feel the constraint as I did, she had a knack of doing the correct thing and was nearly always right in our parents' eyes. She was more equable than I and the petty tyrannies that we endured did not seem to irk her as they irked me. How well I remember, every time that one of us had a cold, the governess saying: 'Now don't snuffle. You are not to blow your nose again for another five minutes by the clock'. We had to drip from the nose in silent indignation.

This was a typical sample of her commands, she had a terrifying capacity for educating everything to law and order and putting it in confinement. I feel sure that she would gladly have squared the curves of a rainbow and fastened it into a cage.

As soon as we took to bicycling one of my greatest joys was to coast downhill, with my feet up on the spikes provided for that purpose on the hub of the wheel. It was in the days before the free-wheel bicycle became universal. Coasting was strictly forbidden by the governess who kept a watchful eye on us as we rode round and round on the wide paths of the garden and we were seldom allowed on the roads by ourselves; now and then, however, I would be sent alone to the post-office at the bottom of the hill and this was always my opportunity, I would coast nearly all the way, enjoying the freedom of a bird on the wing.

The worst moments spent under her rule were the Collect-Epistle-and-Gospel hours of Sunday afternoons. We had to celebrate the sacredness of the day by sitting bolt upright on our hard chairs beside the table, instead of leaning our elbows on it. I can picture myself now, after my sister had gone to her finishing school, sitting opposite the governess, horribly alone, with no hope of escape from her cold eye, first reciting the Collect learned by heart, then reading the Epistle and Gospel aloud and then being read to for the rest of that dismal hour. She read from a little crimson volume, one of a series containing a Sunday portion for each Sabbath of the year. The readings were all unutterably dreary, with never an anecdote nor pictorial touch to enliven them. All the time, I would feel a mental discomfort, or perhaps a spiritual discomfort, comparable only to prickly heat in the flesh. I felt, even at that early age, that this was not the right way of imbibing religion; there was no suggestion of love or kindness in that schoolroom.

Such was my childhood in term time as I remember it now but there were long holidays when, the governess being absent and our two brothers home from school, we had excitement in our everyday life. The most memorable of these, occurring always in the Easter holidays, were our adder-hunting expeditions.

The four of us would set out armed with heavy sticks, with

oranges and lumps of sugar in our pockets. First of all we would go to Gilly Moor, which, like so many other moors in Cornwall, was not an open heath but a swampy valley that defied cultivation. I loved that moor. It had thickets of gorse and a black quiet pond with the dead leaves of many years on its margin, and overhanging willows. Beyond that pond there was a narrow ditch full of stagnant water where, so we were told, leeches could be found, and in a near-by field there was a little well full of newts where we would dabble our fingers in the vain hope of catching one. The moor had also a dry, sunny bank where adders habitually lay.

Sometimes we killed an adder and sometimes our prey would glide away into the gorse before we raised our sticks. The mere sight of a snake, alive or dead, filled me with a sudden feeling of fear, as if someone had seized the most secret parts of my being and was now squeezing them hard, but the knowledge that this sensation would be quickly come and quickly gone always added, strangely enough, to the zest and enjoyment of the day.

Leaving the moor we would walk across fields and granite stiles and through a wood and up a lane where robins always nested, until we came to another swamp in a hollow where there was black mud so deep and treacherous that we always kept away from the edge. After scrambling through blackthorn we came to a hedge with a wide top, leading across the swamp, with impassable mud and water on either side below us. Walking along that hedge top we always felt like pioneers surrounded by danger, as indeed we were, for some of these Cornish bogs are deep enough to swallow a horse or cow. When we came to a dry knoll where there was nearly always an adder lying in the sun. In that swamp I found, year after year, a secret treasure that I came to look upon as a personal friend. I never mentioned it to the others, having already learned that it was better not to show enthusiasm about anything to my family. For once, at the prospect of some new treat ahead, I think it was a circus in the local town, I had said to my sister in tones of excitement: 'Aren't you looking forward to next Tuesday?' and she had replied: 'Well I can't look back as it hasn't come yet'. A cold douche could hardly have been more effectively chilling.

So I would always look at my treasure silently, as it floated on the black water of the ditch, it was less than half an inch across the face and it was pure white, in form like a water-lily, with tiny ivy-shaped leaves. Its name, as I learned later, was *Ranunculus hederacea*. It always seemed to me to be the harbinger of spring and birds'-nests and happy days and sunshine.

Of course on these outings we were looking for birds'-nests all the time, and in those days I had already begun to feel that every nest is a miracle of beauty, but I was very slow at finding them, and I well remember stopping by a hedge, when the others were well ahead of me, to murmur under my breath: 'Oh God! let me find at least a blackbird's or a thrush's nest if it cannot be a robin's'. Among all the perfunctory prayers of my young days this one, at any rate, came from the heart.

Other holiday excitements were our visits to the small home-farm five minutes walk away from the house. There were two cottages, a barn, pig-styes, cow-sheds, a big laundry, drying-ground and a beautiful hay-rick.

In one cottage lived the washer-woman, a square-chinned old woman who looked as if she had never been young; she had soft white wrinkles all over her hands, caused by their constant immersion in soapy water and she wore a black chenille net over her hair. Her daughter, who did most of the work, had been 'walking out' for many years with our odd-job-cum-hoot-boy man and at last, when he was nearing forty, my mother ordered the wedding to take place. After a one day's honeymoon at Penzance they returned to live with her mother and to carry on with their respective jobs.

In the other cottage lived the farmer, a grand old man, inseparable from his gnarled stick, pink-faced, silver-haired, with strong features, but I can no longer recall the face of his wife, although her gifts to us linger in my memory. Sometimes she would bake for us rich potato cakes with many currants, and sometimes she would give us four-inch baskets that she had made from the inside of rushes, after splitting them and extracting the fragile white pith with her thumb nail. They were fairy-like baskets, a touch would have broken them to pieces. The able daughter of these two habitu-

ally wore men's boots and seemed to be always carrying a bucket, she had an aquiline nose and deep black eyes, possibly there was Spanish blood in her.

The object of our visits to the farm was to search for hen's eggs, an occupation that we solemnly called helping the farmer. Round the barn and hay-rick and out-houses we would go, over the rubbish heaps and the hedge, shooing a hen off her nest whenever we found one, enjoying the smell of animals and straw, the excitement of the search, even the crossing of an evil ditch where soapy water from the laundry had settled into a grey slime and nettles grew on either side. That ditch was untained and therefore very attractive. Even now, to take up a hen's egg, warm from the nest, or to smell hay in a barn, will recall, as if it were a touch or scent of yesterday, the sensation of adventure inseparable from those farm-yard searches.

There was also tree climbing. On one red-letter-day we discovered that, from the upper branches of a yew, we could drop on to the kitchen garden wall and walk all round on the flat coping, moving slowly and carefully, looking down on the house and garden and farm, and the moor and Gilly wood, with the widened vision of explorers. One of our favourite occupations was playing hide-and-seek in the wild shrub garden and another, was climbing trees to reach the nests of squirrels, jays and pigeons. I would often climb trees for the sheer joy of climbing, and after a while I began to climb for the joy of personal association with a tree. Once when playing hide-and-seek I was hotly pursued by my younger brother into the upper branches of a bay tree. I took a momentous decision and dropped to the ground, down, down, down, catching at one branch and another as I dropped, in order to break my fall. For years and years I looked back on this descent as a semi-miraculous feat, but lately, when I went back to the old home and looked at that same bay tree, I saw that it was still only about eighteen feet high.

Does one habitually magnify or belittle one's past? Indeed I do not know.

Sometimes when climbing trees alone I had glorious moments among the upper branches, feeling free from the earth, knowing

that my feet were no longer attached to the ground, gaining a new sense of intimacy with the sky that seemed to be nearer than usual. I would become, in the fork of an upper branch, utterly remote from known concerns; my whole world would be only trunk and bough and leafage and a freshened air in my face.

In all the subsequent years, when I have communed with great forests and small woodlands and individual trees, I have never achieved a closer union with a tree than when, as a child, I crouched in a fork or swayed on a bough, gaining the 'no-before-and-after' sensation of losing one's self. I was lost in the soul of a tree.

In later days my search for freedom was to be linked with a passion for solitude and beauty but in those early years I thought little about either. A child is so near the ground that his horizon is restricted and flowers are his natural associates. I remember once finding the orange pistil in the cup of a deep purple crocus and gazing at it with awe. The double daisies in our own gardens were always greatly admired, they were pink and fat and sturdy, yet they did not, like the purple crocus, make one forget the earth all round and the garden wall and the sky overhead and the governess and lessons and meal times, to become only a little pin-point of awareness registering a tip of gold within a purple flower.

It must have been a few years later but I cannot now remember when nor where it was that I recognized the personal beauty of sunflowers. In looking up into their faces I would always experience complete detachment from the everyday world. Later in life, even after one has learned the extreme value of such experience where-in one's own self will fall away like a sheath for which there is no use, one never can achieve the experience by direct effort. Unseen, obliquely, unexpectedly, the divine sensation of losing one's self in beauty, will come, and in a split second one may exchange the fusion of day by day living for a god's own bliss.

As for solitude I do not think that I had any inkling of the happiness that it may confer, yet once I do remember feeling gloriously, deliriously alone in the world.

It was New Year's Eve and we had all attended a Magic Lantern

show for the Mother's Meeting party held in the laundry. It was very hot inside that upstairs room, so overfull with human bodies and the smell of cake and the breath of hot tea and then the excitement of those lurid-coloured Magic Lantern pictures. When it was all over we came down the wooden steps and out into the starlight and suddenly all the world was empty and very cold and there were only dim forms disappearing one by one as the women said good-bye and turned homeward. I found myself separated from the others, standing by the farm gate and looking up at the stars. They seemed to be crackling with brilliance, or was it the cold air crackling on my face? I was alone as never before, alone with the stars and I had a wild desire to crackle with them. They seemed to be shining for me alone and I wanted to be alone with them for ever. I wanted to dance, whirl, fly out of my own body to celebrate that aloneness.

Then I heard my mother calling and I joined the others and we went soberly home down the lane. The stars were silent now.

Our parents were more or less background figures when we were children. My father's working days were over, except for an occasional journey to Queensland to see how his younger brother was managing the cattle-station, and at home he had now become a 'hunting-and-shooting' man, with a taste for gardening. Being somewhat overshadowed by my mother with her passionate love of plants, he took quiet possession of the pond and the swamp beside it and made his own bamboo garden there, collecting and planting about thirty species at a time when bamboos were not generally cultivated in English gardens.

I can see my mother now, passing rapidly from one beloved flower to another, pointing with her stick at a dead or dying failure and saying to the slow-thinking gardener: 'Burn it where it stands'. I can see her too, pausing beside her Chilean blue crocus that was deeper in colour than any gentian and saying to one or another of us: 'Now, if you were only as beautiful as that flower!' On summer evenings she would water one bed after another in the walled garden, with a long hose and a spray, while my young brother and I

toiled in her wake, dragging the heavy coils of piping from one favourite to another.

There are certain fragments of her garden wisdom that I have never forgotten.

'When you pick a flower,' she would often say to us, 'always pick a leaf also and put them in water together.' She belonged to the school of naturalism, for she lived before the cult of table decorations with artificially frosted leaves and contorted objects collected from woodlands and sea-shores. Whenever she was offering, or being offered, a plant and the question arose of when was the best time to move it, she would always say brightly: 'There's no time like the present'. She was shrewdly aware that, on either side, forgetting a promise would be all too easy. Another favourite piece of advice, always given to us privately, was: 'If you are given your choice when you are offered a plant, always take the smallest. It will transplant better and respond more quickly to good treatment'. Her talk was often sententious, even aphoristic, admitting of neither dissent nor discussion. Sometimes it fell rather wide of the mark, as, for instance, when she would exclaim 'Capital!' in a brisk voice, on hearing of a neighbour's misfortune that was not altogether funny. We never quite understood her use of this ejaculation. Was it due to her innate love of sarcasm, or was her mind elsewhere, or was she obliquely rebuking the speaker for making much of trifles? We only knew that she used it constantly, without regard for the lightness or gravity of the occasion, and after a while her nephews and nieces would habitually relate to her stories of mishaps in order to provoke that misplaced and ill-timed exclamation.

In old age it is not easy to project one's mind back into one's childish outlook on the world, an outlook which is often, in fact, comparable to that of a blind puppy. One is so apt to antedate one's little store of understanding, it is so easy to portray our 'Then' self as more articulate, more far-sighted than it actually was. It is almost impossible to feel backward into the unawakened mind of our young days.

When I look on those early impressions of my parents, on my vague, unfinished conception of 'Dwarfie', on our adder-hunting

and tree-climbing excursions, on my rebellious feelings under the iron rule of the governess and my adoration for certain flower-faces, I can only think of the contrast between the weak fibres just sprouted from an acorn and the Leviathan roots of a ripened oak tree.

Yet, even in these rather trivial anecdotes and memories, one can detect the tenuous, groping roots of an impulse towards freedom that would eventually lead the child far afield, always searching for something that she could not find, following after something that she could not overtake; among the wild mountains of Wales and Ireland and Andorra and as far away as the untrodden mangrove swamps of Australia; up, and also down, the unfrequented rivers of Arctic America where pointed fir trees, reflected in the water, would receive a human voice and echo it through forest, and over frozen seas to Polar regions; along the mountain trails of the Balkans where the strange beauty of arid soil and national dress of men and women and unknown flowers filled the world with colour; and always, day after day and year after year, pursuing that same search among books by writers of many centuries and many lands.

Whether it were solitude or beauty or freedom that I looked for I do not know, I only know that there came a time when those three were joined together in my ever-searching thoughts. A thunder-storm could bring me near to what I sought; also, sometimes, the flight of a bird or a sudden light on a flower; lambs bounding in a field, a sunset, a sunrise, stars on a frosty night; a gust of human anger when the customary expression would change and the inner self be displayed without inhibition; and, above all, wind and the sea.

Tree boughs tossing in a gale, wind roaring through them with a voice like the voice of some primitive god, waves assaulting a cliff, waves breaking on rock or shingle, these would always bring me a little nearer to fulfilment of the quest.

CHAPTER 2

: ON GROWING UP :

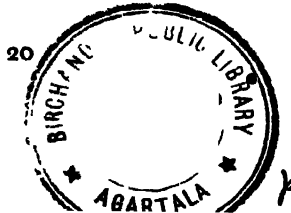
Now, more than half a century after those purple crocuses opened their hearts to the sunlight and those comfortable hens laid eggs in our home-farm ditches and those adders basked on sunny moorland banks in every April, I am fated to encounter many a wider and deeper experience with dulled powers of apprehension. I doubt if a sight of Everest or Kilimanjaro would impress on my mind a picture more vivid than those little scenes of long ago.

One often wonders, in later life, wherein does a child's vision of beautiful things differ from our own? He knows so little about the various forms of our world that he is apt to gaze at any one of them without awareness of its background or foreground; he has the gift of seeing it whole, as a separated self. It is hard to express in words this directness of apprehension. Yet, dwelling on child memories, one can now and then recapture some one impression in a flash but all too soon it is gone again and it is sadly true that memory will often change or blur the outline of the thing remembered. There is, in the child's perception, a certain immediacy, completeness and exclusiveness that we grown-up people, with all our wealth of experience, our habit of making comparisons and our tendency to embrace more than one thing at a time, are apt to lose.

Yet even now there are moments when a single flower-face, a red bar of sky at sunset, the plumage of a bird in sunlight, will evoke that single-mindedness of a child's vision when we first saw something beautiful and opened our eyes a little wider.

Books came very early in that experience of 'something beautiful'. I was always a reader. By 'always' I mean so long as I can remember anything. I do not recall how I discovered that I could find magic between the pages of a book, nor when I realised that, by the help of such magic, I could escape from my own self into somebody else's mind.

The pale blue primer from which I learned to read had very



: On Being Grown-up :

large letters, it was a slender, attractive volume and I can still recall the pride with which, as one finger followed the print, I spelt out my first whole sentence : 'A cat sat on a mat'. Later on, my younger brother was reared on a fat, square volume called *Reading Without Tears* but I have never connected tears with reading, having passed swiftly from that sedentary cat to *Holiday House* and *Grunter Grim* and Andrew Lang's coloured books of fairy-tales and Emma Marshall and L. T. Meade and thence to Henty and Ballantyne and Fitchett's *Deeds that won the Empire*. Charlotte M. Yonge's books, chosen by the governess, were given to us as school-room prizes but we found her writing rather like cake without any currants.

My love of real literature came to life in a dentist's waiting-room, where I found on the table Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* and at once began to read 'Horatius'. The lilt and swing of the verse was like a spell. Then I discovered the book among my brother's school prizes and soon had the seventy verses of 'Horatius' by heart and then made the further discovery that the poem was a weapon with which I could attack my sister's calm. The sound of those verses was like a bee buzzing in her ear.

To me the 'Lays' seemed the last word in melody and power and I began to write verses myself, copying them into a penny note-book bought at the post-office and reverently covered in brown paper. Unluckily my sister discovered the volume one day and I can still remember my bitter shame when she read out these lines with shrieks of laughter.

Away to the woods ho ! ho !
Away to the woods let us go,
Where the ferns grow rank
On the beautiful bank,
Where the rabbits peep,
And the froggies leap.
Away to the woods ho ! ho !

Thereafter she and my brother could always reduce me to helpless fury by quoting that injudicious and fatally repeated first line. The habit of secrecy was then formed in self-protection.

Even now a book is like a magnet and often in a stranger's home

I automatically forget good manners and take up any book that is lying about, in order to read at least the title and the author's name. Seldom does one read a book without finding in it something of value. A dull book can help one how not to be dull and a badly written book can teach one how not to write. This, no doubt, is a self-satisfied point of view and I am reminded of my young cousin who, when I said to him casually: 'How did you learn to drive a car?' replied, 'I chiefly learned by watching Mother's mistakes'. Yet I am sure that even if there is no positive lesson to be learned from the other fellow's point of view enshrined in this or that book, one can always take warning and even gather impetus to think or feel in the opposite direction.

One learns also, in handling books, to appreciate the infinite variety of types in the world; saints and pushful persons, tub-thumpers and Uriah Heeps, cranks and lovers of embroidery, dreamers and statisticians.

It was not until I went to school at the age of sixteen that I met others who knew how important were reading and writing, and this discovery was like entering a land of perpetual summer. Under the régime of the governess I had not even begun to grow up but at school in London I at once struck out roots, tenacious, inter-twisted, exploratory, and this so rapidly that I soon felt like a pot plant awaiting transplantation into larger space and opportunities. School conditions acted on my retarded mental growth like a forcing house.

These conditions were not only encouragement of the passion for books but also friendship with some of my companions, and also the inevitable school-girl 'schwärmerei' adorations centred on one teacher or another. I can remember the faces of all the teachers who came and went and some of them were extremely plain and most of them were ordinary. In addition to all this new experience, I gained at school a sense of Life with a capital 'L', a poignant sense of the future. This thing that I described to myself as 'Life' was not merely growth, nor an ever-widening view of men and things, it was something tremendously important, just beyond the next turning in space and time and as one drew near it always receded.

Round the next bend, after the next day, or the next week, I would surely be able to seize this alluring thing with both hands. I remember so vividly those lit-up moods of adolescence when the proverb 'Forewarned is forearmed' seemed to offer a solution for any difficulty that I might encounter, leaving the future spread out ahead in a sunlit country awaiting my conquest. Reading the works of certain poets and sages would always induce this mood which was, in effect, not a choice of good rather than evil but a swift and sure appreciation of energy as opposed to idleness, of seeing every point of view rather than looking out from a corner on only one, of knowing what one wanted to do and be rather than drifting on the tide of chance. Thus enlightened and forewarned, how could I ever fall into error or fail to fulfil my own ideals?

No doubt I was, as I nursed these thoughts, an example of the pure and perfect prig. It was many years before I realised that life is more like an inexorable river than a sudden illumination. 'Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away.'

Sometimes quite trivial things would induce this mood of elation, a scent, a flash of colour, a tune played on a barrel-organ, a smile on the face of some stranger in the street.

There was one afternoon of summer heat when the smell of London dust seemed like prison walls about us. We were in the sunless dining-room, working at our portable desks on a dull French exercise. There would be no escape from the long afternoon until tea-time. Suddenly a barrel-organ stopped below our window and began to play *The Honeysuckle and the Bee*. In a moment I was released. It may be that I was unconsciously homesick for country sights and sounds, but at any rate, by the music of that tune breaking out so suddenly, I was made free of clean air and open spaces and colour and love and knowledge and an almost merry kind of contentment. I was actually grasping with both hands all that the future held. That tune can still bring back, on a homing wave of memory, a renewed sense of elation.

Into that same dust-laden air we used to emerge on one afternoon in each week of summer to the Borough swimming-bath. I can see that greenish water now and feel again our sense of lessened

cleanliness as we came out, two by two, from that polluted bath back to the sun-baked pavements. I can smell once again the deep red rosebuds that we used to buy from the woman seated at the corner. We would each buy a bud, price one penny, for a special friend or for the favourite teacher of the moment. Seldom were gifts presented with such depth of pleasure, we took the heart of the gift ourselves, for on the scent of one rose we could travel – well, after all, travel whither? We are still in Westbourne Grove according to the story but one cannot imprison the tale of one's secret dreams in human words. All the same, I can make that journey again to-day when I bury my face in the heart of a scented rose.

There were also memorable days when we attended Churton Collins' lectures in Regent Street, travelling by underground railway, walking to and from the stations in crocodile. I would try to linger for a few minutes beside the bookstalls, hypnotized by the paper-backed novels and the penny novelettes with lurid titles. I felt sure that if only I might buy and study these improper booklets, then the secret of life would be mine. What exactly I meant by 'Life' I never could explain to myself in those days; nor can I explain it now.

As for the 'Schwärmereis' that seized on us like an infectious disease, I do not know which is more deplorable, that borrowed German word or our own expression, 'having a pash' for such and such a person. We had reached the stage, in adolescence, of a desperate need to adore something or somebody, and if this need could not be satisfied by heroes, angels or beautiful creatures, then it must needs fix itself on the only object that offered, some plain governess or another who sat day after day at her desk looking out over her spectacles. As I look back on those school-girl emotions centred on mediocre objects, I am amazed at our gullibility. We invested them with beauty when they had no claim to such and with charms that they never had possessed, we lived on a word or look for days and days, because we seldom had privacy in which to disclose our love and when we did have a moment alone with them our nerve would fail us and we would keep our secret to ourselves.

These luckless teachers lived in stuffy attics, on a floor that we called Olympus. Rumour said that they were shamefully under-paid and the term of their tenure was never long, except in the case of the French governess who, presumably, could not save enough to pay her fare home. She was swarthy, with an incipient moustache, owing to which she escaped our admiration.

Among the successive Frauleins there was one with a bleached face and pale blue eyes who exercised a magnetic influence over me. She would slip into my desk folded notes with quotations from German writers and these were strangely intermingled with terms of endearment in German. Thus inoculated with the poetry and philosophy of that nation I worked hard at learning the language. The words of Mignon's beautiful nostalgic song *Kennst du, das Land?* still remain in my memory and the quotation 'Im ganzen, guten, schönen resolut zu leben' induced in me that forewarned mood of rather pompous complacency to which I have already referred. Although I was, in fact, only a prig, I felt sure that I was on the road to sainthood. When at last I won a prize of Goethe's works in four volumes I became duly inebriated by the sorrows of the young Werther and then unduly bored as I ploughed solemnly through Wilhelm Meister's interminable *Years* and also that horrible *Wahlverwandtschaften*. Secretly I began to feel that Schiller's Robbers had much more vim and glory than any work of the arch-pedant of Weimar.

There was never any question of these facile emotions being awakened by either of our Head-mistresses, for Number One was aloof and Number Two was repellent, even when she tried to be hearty. In appearance they were like Mr Long and Mr Short in old magic-lantern slides, but one could not picture either of them chasing a tiger, with his tail caught in a tub, across the Sahara, in the company of those two legendary figures. Number One reigned alone in her sanctum, interviewing parents with a keen eye for their antecedents and ancestors, reading nightly prayers in the drawing-room, eating in private off trays of dainty food that were carried upstairs to her. She was five feet one but she wore high heels and wore also a brownish velvet tea-gown with high Elizabethan ruffles

: Roots and Stars :

to enhance her dignity; sometimes she changed the ruffles but she never changed the gown. She had false teeth, a false toupé and spectacles with thick lenses. We all thought that she was immensely old but she lived on for forty years after most of us had left school.

Her sanctum was full of wonderful books, her mind was steeped in the best literature and she had the gift of imparting both knowledge and enthusiasm. Once a week she came down into the arena of the big schoolroom and taught the two upper classes English literature. She would pace up and down behind the long table, declaiming some passage of poetry or prose, as one might present a miner with a candle before his descent in search of the earth's riches and in this way she lit in some of us a lifelong enthusiasm for good writing. Once she held us all spell-bound as she recited Ben Jonson's lines :

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
.....
In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measures, life may perfect be.

It is to her credit, not ours, that we recognized the beauty of her chosen passages. She had the teacher's highest art, in giving us a little, of awakening desire for infinitely more.

Number Two had nothing aloof about her and nothing false, except her hearty laugh; whenever she tried to be jocular with us she would emit this fearsome sound, raising her upper lip like a horse, uncovering her coarse yellow teeth and deepening every wrinkle on her rough-hewn features. She walked with a heavy tread, on her heels, accentuating the uneven hang of her skirt which was always too long behind. I think that she was conscious of her own ugliness. She was quite six feet and always wore, out-of-doors, an upward-soaring toque and a three-quarter length coat of archaic cut.

No, it was not possible to expend emotion on either of our Headmistresses, nor would they have encouraged any such attitude. We knew this and instinctively hid all evidence of our successive 'pashes' from their searching eyes.

: On Growing Up :

In spite of all these new feelings and interests at school I began to feel homesick for the country, to long for the company of the garden, the fields and hedges, birds and wild flowers. Having always taken them for granted as if they were bread and butter, I now felt the actual want of them as if it were a nagging toothache. I can recall in detail two episodes of school life that were both of them connected with flowers, each one rising like an island from a sea of forgotten memories; one was associated with buttercups and sunshine, the other with white jessamine and moonlight.

On the day of buttercups Number Two was in a mood of non-stop heartiness.

I see her now as rather a loud person, without the gift of gentleness, or the power of whispering, or the capacity to feel the little nameless and unnameable impressions that are so important in life. On that day she was trying so hard to be one of us, as she packed us into the excursion train for Stratford-on-Avon, hurrying along the platform like a determined shepherd, in order to keep us separate from all the other schools; only the sheep-dogs were missing in that scene. For us it was a memorable day; there was the excitement of travelling so far, the sense of holiday freedom, the brilliant sunshine over country that was emerald green and beautiful as country never was before nor since; and then the four round Shakespeare's house and relics. We had never seen a great man's house before and having imbibed Number One's enthusiasm for the poet, we looked upon the dwelling as a shrine. Many of us bought sixpenny china busts of him; they seemed to us most treasurable works of art.

Then we set out, two and two, in a mood of high elation, on our walk across the fields to Shottery.

The climax came in a field that was golden with buttercups. They stood there quietly in millions, with upturned faces and the gold of the flowers seemed to be one with the gold of the great sun. We all stopped for a moment and I was gazing down into that sea of gold and then -- but how can I put into mere words what happened to me then? For suddenly there came a blotting out of all the faces and figures about me, of everything ever seen, heard, felt

or remembered. I was not conscious of the flowers as flowers, nor of the field in which they were growing, I was only conscious of goldenness that assailed and satisfied my senses in one blinding flash, goldenness with no beginning nor end. I was outside time and space. Years later, face to face with one of the Old Masters in Italy, I recaptured that sense of flowers blooming in a world for ever free from to-day and yesterday. In that large canvas they were sprinkled on the greensward of some garden, all about them damsels stood in gold-embroidered gowns, in the background knights on gaily caparisoned white horses were ready for the tournament. A goldfinch was perched on one of those flowers that had no bud nor seeding time, for they had stolen from time the secret of eternity.

On the way to Shottery, as consciousness came back into my mind, I looked down and saw that my shoes were covered with gold dust. In that experience of return I was enjoying, not just one moment of a perfect summer day, but also summer in Shakespeare's England and all the summers through the ages. Then, without any warning, Number Two stopped dead in her tracks at the head of the party.

'I feel as if I'd like to lie down and roll in those buttercups, girls,' she said. And she laughed heartily at her own obscene fancy, drawing her upper lip back from her teeth.

'Beauty and the Beast!' I nearly hissed but I choked down the words.

Not one of us played up to her, not even with a monosyllable. Had we learned thus early that blasphemy can only be countered by silence? I think perhaps our instinctive wisdom had outrun, as it so often will, our conscious understanding. We walked on in silence through the fields to Shottery.

As for the school-girl friendships to which I have referred, some were evanescent and others enduring; it was the closest, more enduring one, with Nadia, that has remained always in my memory associated with moonlight and white jessamine.

Hitherto friendships with others of our own age had been a purely formal thing, parentally appointed, among cousins who would come to stay or neighbours met at parties. They were friend-

ships only in name, there was no emotion between us and those dummies who were our contemporaries. Now at school I got into touch at once with those who shared my taste in books or could talk frankly about their own thoughts, opening up new worlds to me and enlarging, I felt sure, my outlook on human affairs. A parsonage in Wales, a widowed mother in Tunbridge Wells, a lonely Scottish lake, a country home in Gloucestershire, a social round in Antrim, all these I shared by proxy, swelling with pride at my own ever-widening experience. The narrow boundaries of Cornwall had fallen away.

Then suddenly, when talking with some girl more vital or more attractive than her companions, there might be the exchange of a word or two, a look that awakened a quite new feeling, not a spark that would fall and die at the moment of birth but a kindled flame that would grow and spread and become a steady glow hidden in one's innermost self, changing one's whole existence.

My friendship with Nadia lasted over forty years, until her death. She could charm most people at sight. She had grey eyes and a mass of dark hair that fell about her shoulders, a deep voice and a magnetic personality, with a deeply-rooted sense of the romance and mystery in merely being alive. She never lost that sense, even when, as a grey-haired barrister, she could look back on a life of storms and sorrows and emotional adventures.

My parents never smiled upon this friendship. They had been disappointed in their hopes of my making 'suitable' friends at school. What a contradiction in terms! Suitable friends! My younger brother, who had acquired a homely, self-taught wisdom, used to forestall parental enquiries into the ancestry of his friends by bringing home orphan midshipmen; until the time when he slipped up and telegraphed that a certain orphan had to cancel coming to us for a dance because his father had ordered him to come home. But I never could learn how to trim my sails to the wind and when I wrote home from school that my room-mates were Polly Jones and Sarah Potts, even my father, who was not a snob, lost heart about my prospects. Yet I had spared them the truth that Sarah had only one eye and that Polly was feeble-minded.

Later, when I took Nadia home on a visit, she failed to produce evidence or having any suitable relatives and the friendship was discouraged, a course of action that only served, naturally, to root it more deeply.

Nadia and I, not having reached the first class at school, were forbidden to touch the books in the glass-fronted book-case that stood in the big schoolroom. Over and over again we peered through the glass at the titles of these forbidden fruits; Emerson, Swedenborg and the Koran were, if I remember rightly, among them. We both had a feeling that if only we could read those books we should discover something really important, something for which we were always seeking without success; we should solve, perhaps, the problem of good and evil and find out what we were meant to do with our lives.

So, on more than one occasion, we would stay awake until midnight and then tip-toe down the three flights of stairs. Whenever a board creaked our hearts would miss a beat and when the decrepit cook who slept in the basement uttered a hoarse cough, we would freeze into still attitudes with alarm. We drew out one tonic after another but the eerie, weighted silence of the stuffy night air in the schoolroom prevented all clear thought. Then, the spirit of adventure luring us on, we would gently unlatch the shutters of the French window and go down into the high-walled cat-run that was known as the school garden. High in the sky was the Great Wheel of Earl's Court, illuminated, and we could almost feel the pulse of London outside that garden, beating in its sleep.

There and then it was that the scent of white jasmine awakened in us something that we had never learned in books, a sense of wild possessiveness as we realised that the mysterious beauty of life with its intermingled pain and happiness would be ours.

You may analyse this state of mind with Freudian zeal or with medical knowledge, you may ascribe it to the stirring of adolescence or you may believe it was a visitation from the Holy Spirit. Call it what you may, I can only record the fact that we both had a sudden, swift, fore-knowledge of what we were, all too soon, to learn; of how empty and flat are those who have never known

: On Growing Up :

sorrow, of how dense and unilluminated are those who have never known joy.

I can only describe that midnight experience as a poignant sense of futurity. It may be that the adolescent knows little of personal trouble and yet can sometimes register in a flash of apprehension all the sorrow of the world. It was often as though we two were attuned to sadness; although, among actors, we adored Lewis Waller and George Alexander, yet in music we loved the funeral march's best and in poetry the dirges and laments and pessimistic odes. Sometimes we would magnify small disappointments into tragic emotions. We also loved to brood on valedictory poems and would often repeat to each other :

Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew,
In silence she reposes
Ah ! would that I did too.

Until the end of her life Nadia and I would give each other, whenever it was possible, a spray of the sweet-scented jessamine, with its pink buds and white flowers that were like fragile stars. There would be no need to say anything. We each knew what the other knew. Together we had learned it at midnight long ago.

CHAPTER 3

: ON BEING GROWN-UP :

What did 'being grown-up' amount to? Strange and unexpected encouragement to speak sometimes before you were spoken to? Was it just arriving at a certain age? If so, the age was perhaps eighteen in those days but now one may meet children who are grown-up at the age of seven or eight, knowing as much as their elders know of good and evil. Was it leaving the tutelage of paid instructors? Owning a cheque book and an allowance? Either choosing, or being pushed into, a career, if one were a boy, or attending dances and promiscuous social gatherings if one were a girl?

For my part I found it was escaping from the boundaries of happy school life into a freedom that was not freedom. It was like finding oneself in a vacuum with no occupation for mind or body. Life at school had been full, it had also been real and earnest but now it suddenly seemed very empty. In fact the ending of school days led to a very difficult time for girls like ourselves, who were neither rich nor poor.

We had no household duties, except that we took it in turns to 'do the flowers' in the drawing-room. Our parents had no need of help in running the house and garden, controlling the servants and acting as figure-heads in local bazaars and political meetings. We therefore had to fill up our time with what the young things of to-day would describe as 'bits and pieces'. The routine of school had been a moral support and now, without it, I began to sag into an aimless condition, not knowing how to spend the hours of each day. What was life meant to be? Surely something great and good? It was a sudden drop from the thoughts of Emerson and Marcus Aurelius to this undirected, ordinary existence. How trivial, I often think now, was that life of long ago, with no major anxieties, no daily battle with circumstance, no hope of an objective or career. So remote and shadow-like does it seem that I find it difficult to

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recall how we actually did fill our days and weeks and years. What light played over our Then-horizon? What stirrings of ambition or hope or fear arose to trouble and to quicken our minds? I can only recall a few of the comings and goings in our unpurposeful existence.

My capable elder sister settled down to preoccupation with things seen; she attended dairy and cookery classes, reared turkeys and fashioned many of her own clothes. The younger sister, the nestling and favourite of the family, fought a losing battle with asthma all her days, fought it with the weapons of undaunted high spirits and sense of humour. She shared my love for books and, since she had to spend so many days in bed, reading was not considered to be a waste of time.

Often I took long walks alone in open country and as this would have been regarded as peculiar, unless I had some avowed purpose, I made much of my search for wild flowers. How this pretext served in winter I do not remember, but I think I must have replaced the flowers by birds. Indeed there were often exciting birds to be seen in my favourite haunts, for when there was a leaden sky in the north and people up-country were snowbound, hundreds of green plover, redwings, fieldfares and even golden plover would come down to our milder land. Westward, on the high ground above Trebolin, there was rough country with few villages and little cultivation, broken by small boggy valleys and by hills that were crowned with granite boulders. I would take my line across this country, skirting the deeper bogs, scrambling over the loosely built granite walls, and bodying over gates by placing one hand on the top bar and one on a lower bar of the far side, then flinging my legs into the air and alighting upright on the other side. I avoided all roads and footpaths and fellow-creatures and would always gain from these long walks an exhilarating sense of oneness with the country.

We longed to join the Hockey Club but unluckily the people who ran it were regarded by my mother as 'undesirable'. This favourite word of hers bore no reference to their morals but only to their pedigree.

There were parish concerts and socials in which we took part, as

duties, sometimes also enjoying them as pleasures and there were dinner parties at the homes of two 'desirable' neighbouring families. There was nothing of the Good Samaritan about this recognition, once again it was a matter of pedigree. After these dinners we would play card games for small stakes. During the actual meal we all tried to talk at once and when we had succeeded in doing this we knew that the evening had been a success. We enjoyed those parties, yet somehow I always felt that the walk home was the best part of the evening. Out from that noisy atmosphere and the assumed heartiness of one and all, we would plunge into the cold starlit world and I would murmur the lines of Matthew Arnold softly to myself :

Weary of myself and sick of asking
What I am and what I ought to be
At the vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the star-lit sea.

There is nothing mild, gentle nor misty about my memory of that period of my life or of those night skies; a certain austerity was round me like an aura and the cold emptiness of that starlit world would seem like the promise of satisfaction to desire.

Sometimes in summer we attended a rifle-shooting club, bicycling eight miles each way to the gathering. There were also tennis parties and one winter there was an outbreak of roller-skating in our nearest town. Together with our permitted, and also some of our unpermitted, neighbours, we took part in this new form of sociability which was fruitful in that it led to two local marriages but we were as yet untouched by that side of life. My sister 'got on' with men in a friendly way and I did not get on with them at all, or only with an odd one now and then.

As for the balls and dances that broke out like a rash at Christmas time, I dreaded them, endured them and then, in the desperate hope of appearing to be like other people, pretended that I had enjoyed them. My coming-out ball had not been a happy event, for I felt more like a tightly folded bud than a newly opened flower and longed to be back at school among my friends. The actual dancing at those balls was, like all physical activity, pure pleasure,

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but the many attendant anxieties made these social functions a misery. Would I get partners for every dance? Was I looking very plain? Would my hair come down? What could I find to talk about? Would my partners find me very dull? I envied all those others their facility in fitting into the picture but I kept up the pretence of enjoying dances and no one knew that I was light-hearted with relief when the brief season ended.

Had I been truly light-hearted in those days what a parody I could have written on: 'I never loved a dear Gazelle'; but the few men in whom I was interested were regarded as freaks because they were not addicted to hunting and shooting. One of them was terribly serious and another wrote fairy-tales with great intensity before he disappeared into a lunatic asylum.

There were, of course, days and moments of release in that Edwardian life of ours. There was the wild delight of the old-fashioned polka and of the John Peel gallop at the end of each hunt ball, when we would all behave more like runaway horses than human beings dressed up in their best clothes; also there were certain days in the hunting field, either when we took sandwiches and followed the hounds in a dog-cart or, which was far better, when we rode, jumping every hedge, floundering through bogs, flying stone gaps, picking our way over rough hills among the granite boulders. This, however, only happened rarely, when a kind neighbour mounted us or when my sailor brother came home on leave with a few pounds in his pocket and hired a horse for each sister in turn.

Yet, to be fair to our parents and to the spirit of that age, I must own that there actually was some measure of freedom attached to the state of being 'out' and our days were no longer hatefully monotonous as they had been under the rule of the governess; but the trouble was that our parents and relatives had no idea of mental freedom either for themselves or for their offspring. Always excepting the Beloved Aunt, who redeemed the name of Aunt, but she does not come into this story of roots and stars, or not at present. Yet I shall always remember her mockery at the sense of constraint imposed by our way of living and of second-hand thinking. In our home there was never any surrender to excitement,

wonder or enthusiasm. It was a case of eating, sleeping and moving about to do what our forebears did and what our neighbours expected of us, in complete surrender to the slavery of habitual ideas.

Our preoccupations were not only and always parochial and our parents did not wilfully check our amusements although, with an innate, old-fashioned Puritanism, they were inclined to ration them, as if too hearty or too continuous enjoyment of life were a vice.

It may appear to outsiders as if our life in that Cornish home resembled the life of snails in the crannies of a wall, snails totally unconcerned with the world beyond their wall, but as a matter of fact there were certain aspects of our family existence that led our thoughts and imagination far afield, to the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Antipodes. For there were, first of all, my father's periodical visits to our cattle-station in Queensland and then my younger brother's movements in his various ships, and then my elder brother's departure for Queensland as soon as he was old enough to follow the family career marked out for him, a lonely career for which a gregarious person like himself was quite unfitted.

Moreover the vistas that school life had opened, leading beyond the bounds of heredity and circumstance, were not all closed, as I gradually came to understand; there were two directions in which one could escape from the narrow round, reading books and paying visits.

I read in season and out of season, without any plan, but one book always seemed to lead on to another and although supplies were precarious they never actually failed. There were a certain number of disregarded old classics in our library and sometimes I was allowed to add the name of a book that I wanted to our Mudie's Lending Library list which would produce, in due course, a stout wooden box sent by rail and containing eleven volumes of fiction and court memoirs for parental reading. All my spare pocket-money was devoted to buying second-hand books that were cheap in those days and among my early finds were a volume of Crabbe's poems in green and gold binding for a shilling and two little leather-bound volumes of Ossian's poems for eighteen-pence. There were also gifts. I had two godmothers of blessed memory; one, a great

reader herself, sent me some treasurable book every Christmas and the other, a kindly Philistine who did not know a good book from a weak one, who always allowed me to choose my own Christmas and birthday presents.

Gradually I built up a rich little library of English and French books, with a few German classics.

Later on in life I noticed that some one book may become vividly associated with the time and place in which it was first read. Montaigne's Essays had a curious background for my first perusal. Once a week I used to walk across the deserted mining country to visit a blind man in a cottage and teach him Braille. A volume of Montaigne in the three-volume World's Classics Edition would always be my companion and a good companion it was. He was, I felt, a rich personality and as I read him very slowly, while I stumbled along the stony tracks, dwelling on one sentence after another, the depth of his thought seemed to be enhanced by the emptiness of that destitute and saddened country. How often I blessed the editor of the World's Classics. Each volume was so perfectly adapted for slipping into a coat pocket, so comforting and solid in form and its cost was only a shilling.

My first reading of George Borrow had a very different but a most appropriate setting. There came a whole blessed day when all the family were absent and I could do exactly what I liked. I went down to my bog garden with a copy of *Lazarillo* and a basket of food for the day. A little stream beside a rough hedge was the border of that garden which I had made; I used to spend happy hours there, digging in the mud, tending irises and arum lilies and primulas, making small new ponds and channels with as much enthusiasm as if I were damming the Mississippi, planting bamboos for a background and listening to the sound of running water. At the far corner of this garden there was an angle where three hedges met and, on the top of these, a space large enough for me to lie at full length beneath the shade of twisted oaks. All through that day I read and read, nibbling food at intervals and in those hours I became free of the Borrow country for ever, entering into the inheritance that he left for all who seek horizons.

The books that I loved best in those days, before I had even shouldered a rucksack or spent a night beneath the stars, were books about walking and wandering and roads, above all the anthology of E. V. Lucas called *The Open Road*. Going to church on Sundays with mute submissiveness; kneeling down each morning at family prayers; singing three hymns every Sunday night with the assembled household, all giving tongue in dissonance; beginning to realise that the family religion played no more than a formal part in life, that the sense of duty which we inherited was more like medicine or insurance than any rooted flower sprung from man's high spirit of endeavour; such was my outward life while I consorted, in my reading, with the great free-thinking men of all ages.

So, vicariously, I enjoyed the wanderer's free life. I dwelt for many moons with Thoreau in his cabin, tended his beans with him and heard the loon's cry ring out over the lake and echo in the silence of the forest. With Arethusa and a knapsack I followed the roads of France, only rejoining the Cigarette at nightfall, and with the donkey, Modestine, I slept beneath the pines. Striding behind George Borrow I held long talks with gypsies and men at fairs and taverns and people of the road. I followed Hilaire Belloc on *The Path to Rome* and with Maurice Hewlett's *Senhouse* went about the country planting garden seeds and roots in hedgerows.

On the whole, considering how little my parents could sympathize with this passion for books, they were tolerant. My mother would often say: 'You'll read yourself silly' and would try to induce me to take up needlework as a hobby, although, and perhaps also because, she herself had been needle-shy from birth. I do not remember ever seeing her absorbed in a book. On winter evenings she would flip over the pages of some novel or memoir or gardening dictionary at the rate of two seconds for a page, dropping the volumes in a pile on the floor for us to pick up.

My father was a 'live and let live' man, except where Roman Catholics, Radicals and Dirty Foreigners were concerned and he seldom interfered with us but whenever he happened to see a volume of poetry lying about he would mutter into his moustache: 'That fellow Browning again. I bet he never wrote a word of sense

in his life'. His own reading consisted of light novels, Jorrock's and Captain Kettle. He would never have heard of Browning if I had not attended Browning meetings in our cathedral city and I think he imagined that all poetry books were written by Browning. I was allowed to attend these meetings with the Bishop's daughter because she was one of my 'suitable' friends. Once a month the city spinsters, mostly of uncertain age, would meet to discuss the love poems of their idol and these high-bosomed ladies would read aloud to each other in turn, panting with emotion in the lyrical passages. My father's comments cut me to the quick, for Robert Browning was almost a god to me, yet I was quite unable to introduce him to my parents in palatable or even intelligible form.

Among other books that I read, instinctively in secret, were the works of Zola and Voltaire. In the winter we were each allowed a bedroom fire once a week, not, of course, for our own warmth and comfort, but in order to air the room. This enabled me to burn *La Bête Humaine* and also *Candide*, leaf by leaf, as soon as they had been read, lest they should fall under my mother's eye. I had no wish to preserve that Zola for re-persual but I did regret parting with *Candide*, for Voltaire had kindled in me a responsive flame. However I cut out the last page that contained the wisdom of Pangloss in a nutshell: 'Il faut cultiver notre jardin'.

The page was kept safely in my Bible for many years.

Each favourite author would awaken some new thought, ideal or emotion. There was Marcus Aurelius. (How easy to be good and dignified.) Matthew Arnold. (How perfect to be cold and strong as marble.) Robert Browning. (How wonderful to be passionate and swift.) R.L.S. (Streams and trees and the sky and an unfenced road, the only companions for a perfect life.) Voltaire. (How easy to conquer worlds with spear-pointed wit and irony.) Heinrich Heine gave me a premature sense of tears in human life. In the world of books I would feel like a whole personality and would find peace from the torment of vain endeavour to be like other people.

Outside the world of books there was a second, and totally different form of escape; this, in fact, was dependent on other people, mainly on our parents who were imbued with the notion that the

young should pay perennial visits to Aunts; also to neighbours, friends and acquaintances who were actuated by kindly social motives when they issued invitations.

To describe those visits would need a volume but the visits to Aunts (with uncles, if any, thrown in), must be lightly touched on for they were a definite sign that we were now grown-up and fitted to shoulder certain duties. Why aunt-visiting should be considered a duty I never could understand; we licked the butter off the bread of those visits as thoroughly as we could but I cannot believe that they gave the aunts any more pleasure than they gave us. Now that I have reached the age of 'Time's Revenges' I should never dream of asking my nieces to come and stay but, on the other hand, whenever they invite themselves and come I feel extremely flattered. Youth has come into its own to-day.

There was one widowed aunt with whom we were sent to stay, each of us in turn, for week-ends that recurred far too often. On Sundays she would hide away every novel and strew the drawing-room tables with holy books and Parish Magazines and, at Sunday lunch she always had stewed prunes. She was one of those who fasted at the times appointed and gave tithes of all that she possessed but she had a most censorious tongue and we could not help wondering, all through the week-end, what she would say to the family about ourselves, our appearance and our behaviour. The association of sanctity and Malice was repellent then and has made those two things distasteful to me ever since; in fact to this very day the sight of a stewed prune or a holy book will fill me with gloom.

There was another aunt, a kindly person enclosed, with her husband, in the smallest possible provincial circle. Once they had made a world tour, returning home from that journey more insular than before, as if in defence of their own character and outlook. Their house was adorned, or furnished, or 'uglified', use what word you will, with faded snap-shets of Bombay and Honolulu and Niagara; these were pasted, overlapping each other, on cheap cotton screens in the bedrooms, hung in frames on the walls of every living-room and massed in albums that filled innumerable drawers and cupboards. Never were big game trophies of horn or hoof more

honourably housed nor more greatly treasured. We had to look through every album on each visit and my elder brother and I developed a 'Thing' about amateur snap-shots so that now, if anyone ever invites us to look at an album of such treasures, we feel really ill. Paying visits was, however rather a feminine occupation and it was seldom that we shared the performance with a brother.

This particular aunt and uncle held perennial discussions at meal-times about the number of eggs laid by their eleven hens and the length of the Vicar's last Sunday sermon and the noise of their neighbours' guinea-fowls. The uncle was a simple, rather lovable person with a fair stock of very small jokes to which we always responded. Every morning he would walk down to the little town to buy tobacco or to 'see the Bank' and on his return would enumerate the names of each acquaintance who had given him a greeting and now and then, when somebody had hailed him by mistake as 'Colonel' he would be swollen with visible pride. He had been 'something in India' but that occupation was now ended and he seemed quite content with having none.

Beyond their town villa, however, there was beautiful moorland and I was often allowed to go off for a whole day and explore it, taking sandwiches. Sometimes the offspring cousins, who were a few years younger than myself, were sent with me for company, but there were a few happy days when I escaped alone, realising on all such occasions that the ideal companion for a long walk is oneself. Only when one is alone can one receive, in its fulness, the beauty of grass, trees, rain, sunlight and sky.

On one of these solitary walks I came suddenly to a larch wood, the trees were standing beside a lane in their young spring leafage and as I looked at them something broke inside me, or something was born, I do not know how to express the fact that I was seeing as if scales had fallen from my eyes I was in the heart of greenness, absorbed into the unconditioned absolute of greenness. I had lost my identity, just as I had lost it in that field of buttercups and was no longer aware that I was standing in a Devon lane looking at the boughs of larches. To those who think that I am talking gibberish I can only aver that I am relating facts. For all my inex-

perience I had entered, for a split second, that condition which Yogis attain after years of abstinence and study.

Those Devon visits were happy ones, despite the Philistine atmosphere of the house, for after all the uncle and aunt were tolerant, placid people and they were full of kindness. It was a very different matter when we were sent to stay with certain rich cousins whose lives were so stiff with conventions that they might just as well have joined the gallery of Madame Tussaud's figures.

They had beautiful pictures and china, kept there, so it always seemed, rather for the sake of their value than for joy in their loveliness and they had beautiful plants in the garden but the happy common flowers were everywhere cut and pruned to make way for some rare specimen. They lived by the rule of unalterable little habits, they never felt, or at any rate they never indulged in, any sudden impulse and whenever you stepped from the open air into their hall you would breathe hard and heavily in order to survive. A wise old friend was staying in the neighbourhood once when her hostess suggested taking her to tea with those cousins, in order to see their garden. 'No thank you,' said the wise one, 'I've been there before and I shouldn't know which chair I had to sit on.' She knew that in their daily life every smallest movement was regulated and indisputable. To every man his chair and to every woman hers; and little stools for the children, exactly graded to their height; and for the servants a standing posture; and life would surely crumble if percher or the thing perched upon were out of the appointed order. For the guests there was neither freedom nor peace, not for one moment of any day were they left to their own devices. After breakfast the plans were laid down, the activities arranged and thereafter, all through the day, mind and body were confined as in a strait-jacket, until the regulated most welcome and mercifully early hour of bed-time.

The mind of that hostess would chew the cud of facts with the slow movements of a ruminating cow, until in the end all things in heaven or earth were reduced to a common size and shape, but the force of her character was such that even strong-minded people would agree with her when she declared, as she often did, that black was white.

: On Being Grown-up :

The whole house smelt of repression. 'Little boys don't go into little girls' bedrooms,' she said to her sons one day when she found them playing with their sisters; the sons were six and seven years old, the daughters younger. What she said to the boys when they were fourteen I do not know, I only know what she told her marriageable daughters as, one after another, they became engaged and were on the eve of marriage. What she told them about the facts of life was – precisely nothing.

It would seem as if, in those years of freedom that was no freedom, we had but exchanged the confines of the schoolroom for a larger enclosure that was kept in shape by negative and positive commandments. The fact that many of these were implicit rather than expressed did not lessen their power. I can only recall a few of them. You must always try to look like other people. You must not consort with second-rate persons; once again this was a question, not of character but of ancestry. You must not spend all the hours of any one day in just enjoying yourself. You must not dispute the rightness of anything that your parents do or say or believe and you must allow them to arrange, or at any rate to supervise, your friendships. You must love your aunts and uncles and even tolerate your cousins. There were also self-appointed vetoes, the outcome of one's own experience. You must not allow yourself to be spontaneous or enthusiastic or excited over little things, for any such display would invite a cold douche of disapproval or misunderstanding from the elders. You must conceal any immoderate affection that you may feel for anybody. You must not talk about your cross-country walks unless you have justified them by some sensible objective. You must hide your propensity for making friends with peculiar people. Above all, you must never talk about the books you read.

Thus equipped, as it were with chain-mail defences, against the impact of new people and new things, I lived as best I could in those Edwardian days, but all the time my roots were growing steadily as I consorted, among my books, with thinkers of all ages and many nations. Every now and again from one of these would come such an illuminating flash that I felt as if I were seeing stars in the daylight sky.

CHAPTER 4

: ON PAYING VISITS :

There were, however, other visits of a more congenial nature and there was another relative, my father's elder brother's wife, who redeemed the name of 'Aunt' for me and bore with my whole-hearted devotion for over forty years.

It is not easy to recall our first visit to the old family home in the Welsh border country, because that home has meant so much in all our lives; later impressions are apt to overlie the early ones. I must go far back in time to revive the memory of that day when the four of us set off, very young children complete with nurse, to stay there for a whole month in the summer. We had talked about that journey for many weeks and had thought of little else and Nurse was tired of our question, each and every morning: 'When is Stanage day?'

I remember so well the long day in the train and threading small beads from a cardboard box and choosing the colours with great care, and how we were all of us asking questions at once about the Severn tunnel, and how we thought its darkness would never end, and how thrilled we were by the apparently unending length of that journey and by thoughts about our unknown destination. I remember also how we slept in Hereford at the house of a be-wrinkled great-aunt who had one leg shorter than the other and how next morning, as she lay in bed, she asked me to kiss her good-bye and how I drew back in terror, thinking that she looked like a tortoise or a witch, and how I have ever since been ashamed of that cowardly refusal.

That month-long visit was full of new, romantic experience. There were cray-fish in the streams and pyramidal ant-heaps in the great woods; there was an uncle home from Australia who used to take us out fishing from a boat on the pond which had an island, and there was the exciting scent of bracken that grew on

the park bank, acres and acres of it in a green sea far above our heads. There was also a moment when I stood on the terraced garden looking at the Calceolarias. They were the large-flowered kind, with blooms like fat purses, some of them were spotted and others were pure gold and others velvety brown, and I was looking with astonishment into their faces which grew about as high as my waist, and they seemed to be the richest flowers that I had ever met. That scent of bracken was always associated with the place to which, in after years, we invariably turned as a refuge in times of trouble or as a home of happiness and freedom, according to our need of the moment.

The uncle, aunt and cousins led full lives and all had open minds, not one of them would have been content with a single idea as their pilot through life, not one of them would have tolerated Puritan taboos; books, music and architecture, gardening, forestry, pony-breeding, art and otter-hunting and county education. Eisteddfodds, shooting, travelling, all these things were a part of their lives. Years later some of my happiest days were spent with those cousins exploring the Welsh mountain country in a horse caravan.

I do not remember my first impression of the beloved Aunt but I can just recall her, on that first visit, as a figure who was tall and very beautiful, with golden hair and a way of standing with her arms folded in the most perfect attitude.

She emerges clearly in later memories of my teens and of the time when I was just grown up and was left in her charge for six months while the family went to Australia. Of course she was a matriarch and she dominated all who came near her. Why not? She was born to dominate. She had all the gifts, beauty, intelligence, the art of mockery and a great sympathy with those in trouble. When I sit quietly now, listening to the echoes of the past, I can sometimes see and hear her quite distinctly. She is sitting at the dining-room table in her high-backed chair, with her fair hair outlined on the dark mahogany, being not so much the leader as the centre of all the conversation, breaking now and then into a resonant laugh that was like a peal of bells.

She was happy in her marriage with my uncle, a man who re-

mained perennially young by reason of his hobbies that ranged from playing the violin to planting conifers. After his death she was happy in a ripe old age, as the centre of her children, grand-children and great-grandchildren and when she died, quietly sitting up in bed at breakfast with a book before her, she left nearly forty descendants to mourn her going.

Among other worth-while, though less exciting visits, were those we paid to certain Cornish cousins, most of these being now connected with happy memories of birds, flowers and the sea. It is a strange thing how, at the actual time, people seemed all-important but now, looking back, I realise that it is the places that stand out as if they were a permanent possession, while the human figures of those long-past days are fading away. One family of cousins lived in a house above a tidal river and I could hear, as I lay in bed at night, the wailing cry of redshanks and curlews coming up through the darkness from the mud flats below. That sound, like the scent of jessamine at school, taught me something never to be expressed and never to be forgotten. It was like music in the directness of its message, it was a wordless voice from an unseen world.

Another family of cousins lived within reach of a solitary and rock-bound coast; they were all congenial, both the old and the young generation. Living far from any railway, neighbours or excitements, they had found happiness in simple things and were intimate with the wild life of their peninsula. There was never a dull moment when one stayed with them, nor any feeling of restraint; we used to drive out in a pony-trap and put up at a farm overlooking the sea and even in winter we would eat our lunch in some bracken-filled hollow of the cliffs, watching the gulls and shags and cormorants below on their islet rocks. Sometimes, in the month of March, we would watch a pair of ravens building their nest on some ledge of the cliff and if we sat very still among the dead bracken stems on a day of sunshine, an adder would glide away at our very feet into the gorse bushes. Later, in April, there would be a glory of white and gold on those cliffs, wherever black-thorn and gorse clothed a hedge or filled a valley. Once, as we climbed a hedge on those high cliffs, a hedge that dropped sheer

into a ploughed field, there rose up a flock of some seventy gold-finches, outlined like sparks of fire on the dull earth.

In complete contrast to these family visits were those that we paid to our parents' friends and neighbours in our early grown-up years; they were sometimes repetitive and seasonal but for the most part they were chancy and unexpected. The invitations were never refused, only if two happened to clash we were always instructed to accept the more distant one, seeing that the other family who lived nearer might perhaps invite us again; even a short journey was an undertaking in those days. Visiting was, to use an ugly modern word, the occupational part of our lives and although my mother was not like the designing parents of fiction who propel their daughters towards matrimony with unashamed determination, none the less she probably nursed secret hopes about the possible results of visiting. As for ourselves, we never felt like a dove sent out from the Ark to see the world, we were more like fat cattle on parade and we went, more often than not, unwillingly.

My sister was the more fortunate of the two as some of her visits led her to Ireland and many days of hunting. For me the shooting parties were the worst ordeals of all and if my mother did sub-consciously regard those gatherings as a possible marriage market, then her choice of a site was singularly ill-chosen, for the guests were mostly sober married men with, perhaps, one or two middle-aged fogies who were encrusted bachelors and who graced such parties like a standing dish. These bachelors made little contribution to talk or merriment in the evenings, having become habitually silent from living alone but they were good shots.

I never shall forget the formality of my first shooting party. It was stifling. We had to dress five times a day because short skirts out-of-doors and long ones indoor were the fashion of the moment. We stood about in dreary woods which were dreary only because they were full of so much unnatural clamour that one had no chance to recognize the trees as companions. Had I been alone with them and the dead leaves underfoot and their lovely silhouetted branches, brown or grey or silver, those woods would have been a Paradise; but our party had destroyed the woodland peace, even

the tits and blackbirds were in panic movement as the line of beaters came near and nearer, tapping out sharp sounds from the tree trunks, whacking the undergrowth and emitting from their own throats uncouth burring or clucking sounds like the utterance of prehistoric man.

A loud cry of 'Over!', an upward whirring of wings, a dark living object overhead flying in freedom against the sky, a bang and then a 'plump' and there lies at your feet a ragged huddle of blood and feathers, drawing up its claws in last convulsive struggles. No time to shorten its death agony for the cry sounds again and this time it is a high right and left and one bird falls into bushes and the other plops heavily into a pond. Then we move on to the next stand and there is a long wait in the blue damp air that is caught and hung like a veil between the trees, while the last russet and golden leaves are outlined on that blue, ready to fall at a breath of wind; and underfoot the ground is dank and sodden and we are each placed behind one of the guns, waiting for the beaters to advance, their shouts that are at first far distant sounding like echoes in the wood, then coming closer with crescendo noises. Then it all happens again, the dead pheasants are collected and we move on once more, making desultory conversation as we go, looking back over a shoulder in reluctant farewell to that wood, as if we had encountered some friend in a crowd that gave us no chance to exchange greetings.

The evenings at those parties were more dreary than the days. Dinner would drag on interminably, long after small talk to right and left had run completely dry and one could only pray for the dessert and remain with ears pricked for the talk going on across the table, hoping that it might spread and engulf one's own two silent companions and one's self.

Among familiar figures I remember one who was so slow in speech and mastication that his average contribution to talk during a dinner would be two remarks between each course, or perhaps one and a half, the second being often interrupted by the arrival of food. No one ever asked him a question, one might just as well have aimed an arrow at the moon but he was a fair shot, with one barrel, and

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was therefore a hardy-annual guest, useful for the purpose of making up the required number. There was also the veteran who would discourse into any willing ear about the woodcock he had shot and about how, when and where, during the last forty seasons, he had missed those birds that would have brought his score up to two hundred.

On one occasion I was seated next to a bald-headed bachelor in his early fifties. He asked me, over the entrée, if I would like to hear about his life-long ambition. There had been hardly any preliminary talk to this friendly offer and I was astonished at what I took to be my own social success with this country squire who was by repute rather a curmudgeon. I prepared to listen with eager interest.

'I'd like to be a dentist,' he said, 'then I could give some of my neighbours what they deserve.'

As a matter of fact this proved to be the most animated remark that I ever heard from a dinner-companion at any of those shooting parties.

The older generation of dangerous shots was nearly extinct in those days but many tales were told about their prowess. One survival I remember who used to figure as day-guest year after year. He would drive over in an Inverness cape that had belonged to his father, one of those capes that, when they have become stiff with age, can stand up empty like a bell. He wore a monocle on his good eye but it was always slipping off and it is not likely that he ever saw the bird at which he aimed; perhaps, like Mr Tracy Tupman, he even closed his eyes before he fired, but he was an important member of society because he had good pheasant coverts of his own. He it was who had the misfortune to pepper his own keeper in the legs and that keeper it was who had the temerity to grumble at the mischance, remarking in a sour tone: 'I wudden a minned ef Maister adden gof me both barrels'.

All these visits were arranged for us, we had no say in the matter, so we enjoyed them when it was possible to do so and endured them as best we could when there was nothing else to be done about it. Visits, in those days, were like a natural feature in a landscape. They were, in fact, an integral part of our young lives.

Soon after I left school, when I was missing my school-friends sadly, I began slowly but steadily to press for permission to go and stay with one or two of them. Enquiries were duly made about the parents and in the end the belongings of Nadia and Marjorie and Amy all passed the censorship. Then one day I found myself in the train setting off on the long journey to Tunbridge Wells to stay with Marjorie for a fortnight. My first round in the struggle for freedom had been won and how good it was to be going to an unknown yet self-chosen home, to feel sure of a welcome from one person at any rate who would act as bodyguard against the awful sensations of shyness and awkwardness that always assailed one on entering a strange house.

It was a semi-detached villa in which I found myself and it was a house of women only, for Marjorie had lately lost her father, a country rector. I suppose my mother did realise that some few clergymen were 'undesirable' but all through her life the words 'recommended by a clergyman' would act on her with a sure and beneficial effect. It was owing to her late father's profession that Marjorie and her family had so easily passed the censorship; even after death the Rector's benevolence had survived.

My friend now lived with her widowed mother and three unmarried sisters. Despite the rather cramped setting of the family there was a great sense of freedom in that home, for they all recognized the value of books and indeed a passion for reading was the link that had formed and then maintained our friendship.

The mother always read family prayers at ten o'clock in the evening. Sometimes the clock would strike that hour when our card games were in full swing and then she would ring the bell for the two servants, would read the evening prayers and calmly return to her Knaves and Kings and Queens almost before the echoes of the blessing had died away in the little parlour. There never seemed to be any false note about this overlapping of prayers and games, the performance did not seem to belittle religion but rather to recognize its importance in daily life. It was one of the few occasions when I was aware of a strong and genuine piety. Marjorie and I used to make long excursions on our bicycles and there was never

any limit to our energy, nor, apparently, to the horizons that we opened up and overpassed. It was tame country but unknown and so much bigger in scale than Cornwall. We would often feel as if we were growing wings and were about to achieve the freedom of a bird. We explored Ashdown Forest and Battle and Hastings, Penshurst and Bodiam; also Groombridge where the rare gentian grew and the valley that is called the Garden of England. There were moments when, sitting on a height, we felt that the whole beauty of Kent, even the whole beauty of our green England was lying at our feet, inviting us to explore it.

The only thing that I missed was water. I used to look about for a pond or river to rest my eyes from all that green Kent had breadth and length, no doubt, but it had only that two-dimensional, static beauty, for there was never a lake to mirror the sky and suggest depth, nor ever any running water, the life of even the most quiet country; Kent was beautiful and wide but some day, somewhere, I would have to find wild country.

Then there were visits to Nadia. Most fortunately for me it had been discovered that her step-father was a scion of an Irish family with an aristocratic name, indeed there was a rumour that a certain Baronet in the far west was one of his remote cousins. Happily my mother did not discover that the step-father and Nadia and her mother had to lead a somewhat roving life on account of his debts; nor did she ever know that the mother had once been an actress in Australia. At any rate I was allowed to visit this nomad family in the various places where they made a halt, in London, in Ireland and in small villages of the Home Counties.

Her mother was one of the most tolerant people I have ever known. She had happy dancing eyes with a secondary veiled expression that appeared sometimes, as if she had looked into good and evil and had returned from those far journeys wiser but undismayed. Her eyes would often seem to be saying: 'Oh, yes, I understand it all and you needn't be ashamed. Everything is good from one angle or another.' She was the first person I ever met, indeed the only one I met in those days, who thought it wise and natural when I went off to walk alone, as I went once on a day of

mist and drizzle, to wander up the coast of Ireland from Malahide. Nadia never was a walker and I really liked my own company. Her mother seemed to know this instinctively and to understand also why I was always scribbling, setting down my inadequate thoughts about great matters and small ones.

I could talk to her about all these things and her sympathy would give me a momentary feeling of self-confidence. Sometimes I would even feel sure that one day I really should be a writer.

It was not so easy to arrange the visits to Amy, the third of my staunch friends. She was an only child and her father was a widower, a rich solicitor living in a large house in Kensington. My mother always spoke of that profession with ineffable condescension. 'He is a little solicitor,' she would say, as if no solicitor were ever big and she would say it in a tone that suggested such creatures were outside her own orbit. As a matter of fact my father had a cousin who was a solicitor but he was always kept in the background, except when legal advice was required.

On the other hand this Kensington address was a good one, so my mother took the bull by the horns and when she went to London to visit her dentist and her dressmaker, staying with our paternal grandmother who kept open house to all the family in Eccleston Square, she invited herself to lunch with the widower.

It was all a great success. Amy played her part with demure reserve; her father displayed his collection of oriental china, his house and his even more than middle-aged housekeeper who habitually wore a wig. My mother noted the heavy silver on the dining-room table, mentally assessed his income and decided that he was a worthy, reliable, self-made man, proud of his riches and ready to spend them on others. The ban was lifted and I now had entry into a whole new London world. His obvious respectability and wealth had won the day; to give my mother her due, when she noted those two assets she had given the wealth only secondary consideration.

I stayed with Amy for weeks at a time and every day was full of new and rich experience. The occasional dances and social gatherings that I had to attend with father and daughter meant nothing to me but my explorations with Amy into the low life of London

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meant much. We went to the Thieves' Market in the Caledonian road and to the Jewish theatre in Whitechapel, where we sucked oranges happily like all the other spectators; we visited the Charing Cross Road often to browse among the second-hand books and we went to Petticoat Lane on Sunday morning. Sometimes we would go to a small Soho restaurant where, in those days, we could get lunch or even a three-course dinner for one and sixpence. When we went out with her father he would take us to the Burlington Arcade and buy us gloves and then we would lunch at the Carlton and go to a play, always sitting in the stalls. He could not understand our wish to see any other side of life and often when we returned from Soho or Whitechapel he would sigh and say regretfully: 'I can't think why you girls don't prefer a good hot dinner at home', and we would both laugh immoderately. That phrase 'a good hot dinner at home' seemed to sum up a certain way of life, a way that Amy was doomed to follow but it was a way that held no attractions for her and was anathema to me.

Amy made several attempts, in after years, to escape from the social round in which her conventional, kindly father tried to enmesh her but she only achieved temporary spells of freedom, until at last she married a wandering journalist and a few years later, after many years of devoted friendship, we drifted away from each other.

The good grandmother did not provide a hotel for my mother only, she would welcome any of us at any time and we could stay with her for long or short visits as we liked. Thanks to this second home we soon learned more of London life than the average country cousin will learn in a life-time. She was good in every sense of the word. I have never met anyone else who would so habitually and naturally speak of the Deity in her everyday talk. He was no mere Sunday guest of honour for her, nor was His name confined to moments of emotion only; one felt He was ever present in her comings and goings. There was no question of Sunday prunes and banished novels in her house, for she connected religion with happiness, not with gloom.

Our dear Grannie had also a wholesome respect for Mammon

and a quite unreasoned admiration for any live Lord. She cherished inordinate ambitions for her grand-daughters and had set her hopes on one particular branch of the peerage to provide a husband for my elder sister. We looked up this family in the red book and found that there was only one contemporary bachelor and that he was put away in a mental home. She had nine grand-children and she loved them all dearly. My mother, who had no illusions about her own offspring, often used to say to us: 'All your Grannie's geese are swans'. However that might be, I am sure that no gosling ever had a more devoted grandam.

She was a good and reliable 'tipper' too. There was always a golden sovereign forthcoming at the end of a visit and the same for each of us at Christmas, with many other gifts, and ten shillings again on New Year's Day.

My sister and I could not find it in our hearts to grumble at the one annual service demanded of us, much as we disliked it. We had to help Grannie in selling white elephants at a big missionary bazaar where she ran a stall for 'our Brethren in heathen darkness in Australia'. As my great-uncle, father, uncle and brother all spent the better part of their lives on the cattle station in Queensland that was a hundred and twenty miles from a church and a town, we felt sure that this reference to heathens included them and we resented the word, more particularly when it was embodied in a special petition offered up at daily morning prayers before breakfast.

At one of these bazaars a lady came up to our stall to ask for aboriginal curios. Grannie was nonplussed. She looked about her in vain, aware that she had neither emu skins nor boomerangs among the horrors that adorned her stall, yet reluctant to say 'No'. Her eye lit on us, lurking in the background, ashamed of our own existence and the part that we were playing among those outmoded objects of china, wool and brass, our special *bête-noire* being a black alabaster horse, permanently reared up on its hind legs and permanently unsaleable until, eventually, my unwilling sister was sent round the square to raffle it among Grannie's 'bedlied' acquaintances.

She beckoned us forward. 'No,' we heard her saying brightly, 'no native curios but here are my two grand-daughters and they

: On Paying Visits :

were both born in Queensland.' Two more sheepish aborigines were never presented to any stranger.

Grannie's worldly side was sometimes closely and strangely linked with her religion. A certain cousin was agent to a Duke and the ducal opera-box at Covent Garden would often be loaned to him for a few nights and then sub-loaned by him to Grannie who would collect a party with great delight. As a return courtesy, she once invited the cousin's wife to share her pew on Sunday morning in order to hear the High Church service, complete with incense, and to confess her sins in the vestry afterwards to Father X, by special arrangement, this Father being Grannie's High Church pet of the moment. I think the cousin had some other engagement on that Sunday.

Somehow, in this drift of petty occupations and new scenes and movements that were subject to other people's whims, we had entered on the grown-up stage without being aware of any dramatic change in ourselves. At any rate school and its attendant activities had slipped into the past like vanishing telegraph posts seen from a railway carriage window. We had left our teens behind us and were in the early twenties, eager, though hardly yet equipped, for all the tougher tests that life might bring us.

We did not reach the testing time until 1914 and even then we did not, for many years, realise that the First World War had finally shattered the quieter kind of life that we had known in our adolescence.

CHAPTER 5

: THE OPEN ROAD :

Writing one's own life story is like tracing the design in a carpet. Slowly the pattern emerges but one is often tempted to give up following that pattern year by year in order to trace, prematurely, the course of one single thread, a taste, an ideal, a tendency, and then it becomes so easy to exaggerate here and there, to thicken a line, to heighten a colour. It becomes also so difficult to reconcile conflicting claims between the single thread and the larger theme, or even to maintain an accurate time sequence. One may begin by moving on steadily with an occasional prophetic glance or forward innuendo but soon one meets with the fatal temptation to look back, flashing the search-light of to-day's wisdom on to yesterday's folly, crediting youth with some of the knowledge acquired by age, blackening the shadows and gilding the joys of long ago.

It is, moreover, almost impossible to recapture, even in thought and much less in words, the ignorance, the innocence and the comparative emptiness of those early years.

Yet at this point I feel impelled to look forward, following the course of my lifelong passion for the open air, the open road and solitary places. It began, no doubt, with those childish dreams about Dwarfie and about escape from the governess but in time it became a ruling passion that was to lead me far from the ecstasy of sitting alone in some little Cornish field or on some granite boulder that crowned a hill, to wander in distant lands and sometimes even to recapture man's long-lost intimacy with dark night and dawn. It led me to sleep out on Irish hills with newspaper for a blanket and the rucksack for a pillow; to camp beside many a peat-brown river among the mountains of Wales; to paddle a canoe down river in the Arctic solitudes of Alaska; to find beauty in the desolate mangrove swamps of Australia; to walk beside the Rhone, day after day and week after week, from the glacier source to the Mediterranean delta.

: The Open Road :

On all these journeys I was seeking escape from the haunts of man into the sanctuaries of nature.

This search, or passion, or mania, was frustrated for many years, during which I read again and again E. V. Lucas' Anthology *The Open Road* and some of Walt Whitman's poems and Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey* and his other vagrant masterpiece *An Inland Voyage* and also Thoreau's *Walden* which was for many years my bible.

On leaving school I had soon realised that it would not be easy to fulfil those dreams. What would my parents have said if I had announced : 'Now I want to go off alone on a walking tour into wild country. I would rather have the company of hills and valleys and open fields than of people.' They would have showered questions on me, questions such as : 'You don't propose, I presume,' (using that sarcastic 'presume' of the older generation to express a sense of outrage under pretended disbelief), 'to go alone? And where, pray, would you propose to sleep? What would people think of you, walking about like a common tramp? Isn't your own home comfortable enough?'

An immediate bid for liberty was out of the question. The only thing to do was to wait, like a Quaker, until a way was 'opened'. I had to wait for many years.

In my young life there seemed to be people, people everywhere; no one sought for, or even desired solitude and I hid my own craving jealously, being in mortal fear of appearing unlike all those others who were supposed to be our friends or, worse still, were actually our cousins. Nearly all our time was wasted in intercourse with such. Escape from the bonds of family life into the absolute freedom of which I dreamed was not possible but I became more and more expert in finding pretexts for solitary walks, pretexts that would satisfy, on my return, the family's detestably reasonable enquiries as to where I had been and what I had done. They were quite convinced that a walk had no value in itself. They never could have understood Edward Carpenter when he exclaimed : 'I sweep a great space round me and stalk in the middle of it'.

There was, as I have already related, the search in many direc-

tions for wild flowers and if I returned with a plant of sundew or a butterfly orchis or the uncommon soapwort, my mother would regard the walk as justified. Then, when I developed the habit of watching birds I was thankful that they were endowed with wings and not roots, for I could wander far and wide in search of birds without obligation to bring home any trophy. These hobbies, however could not be ridden too hard and finding it necessary to provide myself with other objectives for lone walks, I gradually acquired certain friends in cottages. There was the blind man beyond the deserted mines and a little dressmaker with arthritis in a green valley and various old women, living in lovely secret places, who would always be grateful for soup and so on. In all these wanderings I never knew exactly what I was seeking; it may have been beauty or solitude or wild tracts of country where nature was still free from man's intrusion, or it may have been all these things.

I only knew that to rest awhile in open country or secret valleys, out of sight of any human dwelling, would always give me an almost religious sense of contentment. Sometimes also I would find an unfrequented wood or coppice and, once I was within it, the companionable trees on every side would satisfy that longing for freedom which I followed as one might follow a will-o'-the-wisp.

Several years passed however before I achieved the freedom of travel with a rucksack and felt that exhilarating sensation of the wanderer who does not know where he will rest for the night. I do not now recall exactly how this first victory in the battle for freedom was won, for it seemed to happen quietly and naturally, like so many of life's changes.

The Tunbridge Wells family had rented, for their summer holiday, a cottage near Morwenstow. Marjorie and her younger sister came to stay with us for a few days and asked me to go back to the cottage with them. How I blessed her late father's profession and also his second name, O'Brien, which, with the help of a hyphen sufficiently gilded the pill of Hodge. My parents now regarded this friendship with toleration for Marjorie was quiet and well-mannered and her sister was just a smaller replica of herself. My father was only too thankful that I had not brought home from

school the one-eyed Madge Potts or the rather simple Sarah Jones; he chaffed Marjorie in a pleasant way and she would always giggle happily. The visit of the sisters was a success.

It was somehow arranged without any parental protest that they should send their luggage back by rail and that we three, carrying haversacks only, should walk up the Cornish coast to Morwenstow, where I would stay for a few days with the Hodge family. I wrote to Gamage's and bought, by post, my first rucksack. It was a proud moment when it arrived and I wriggled my arms into the straps.

So it fell out that my first walking tour was in our own county, along the rugged north coast that achieves a climax of beauty at Tintagel. You can stand there many hundred feet above the water and listen to the booming of the sea with its deep bass note of immemorial lament. Never anywhere else have I heard that peculiar note, like the voice of eternal warning or despair, resonant and prolonged, as if some tormented spirit were imprisoned in the surging sea. Many a time since then I have stood on some north coast ledge or pinnacle, looking down on the waves that end their journey beneath Canbeak and Dizard and High Cliff, Beeny and Hennacliff and Tintagel, and have felt that the yearning sadness of all ages had found a voice in those deep unresting waters.

At the end of our first day's walk, when we had planned to sleep at Tintagel, darkness began to overtake us before we had found a lodging. We lost our way on the coastal path and in the half-light I clambered to the top of a very high hedge to take our bearings; the other two followed me. We found ourselves on the brink of the cliff and the roar of the sea came up from very far below and we could only just discern the whiteness of breaking waves; there was no sign of a track on the farther side of the hedge and we felt as if we had come to the edge of space on that cruel coast.

I had assumed leadership, partly as hostess in my own county, partly because the sisters were terrified. We climbed down from that hedge and retraced our steps, found the track again and groped our way towards the lights of Tintagel where we finally found a lodging for the night.

When I was in bed there came a tap at the door, followed by a

deputation of two figures in long wispy nightgowns. Both the sisters had eyes the colour of coffee-berries and rather timid faces; their eyes were now starting from their heads with remembered terror as they begged me to find a lodging next day before darkness overtook us. I lay back on my pillow and laughed and laughed until the bed shook, while they talked of what would have happened if we had taken a running leap at that hedge and rolled off on the other side; but I had learnt my own lesson and gave the required promise.

The second walking tour was a more ambitious expedition and was only made possible by a family tragedy that took place a few years later and by my subsequent depression which seemed incurable until I began to study maps of the Lake district with a certain amount of interest, after many weeks of utter listlessness. This interest was encouraged by the doctor and in due course I found myself setting out for a walking tour with the faithful Amy, on the track to Sty Head Pass.

We each had a rucksack to hold all our belongings but she wore high-heeled shoes and an upward-soaring toque while I had solid brogues and an all-weather felt hat. I had my Tintagel experience behind me but she had no experience at all. We were making towards Westwater, with an idea that when we came to our highest point we might sleep out. Since it was summer time we had decided that we did not need blankets but I had brought a few newspapers, having understood from perusal of open-air books that these would keep off the dew and keep in the warmth. We were ill-equipped, totally ignorant of mountain country but alert for adventure.

Having arrived on the top of the pass we spread out our belongings on the stony track where it widened a little above a steep precipice. It was not very warm but the excitement of possessing that high place alone, in the evening light, was better than all the warmth and comfort we had ever known; or so we thought for a little while as we lay there, precariously wrapped in newspaper that would not stay tucked in beneath us. Presently a chill mist came rolling up from the valley. It grew colder and colder, our teeth began to chatter. The newspaper did not seem to give us any warmth and we were already wet with dew. Far below, as we knew,



The author as a child

in the world of warmth and comfort that we had forsaken, was the Wastwater hotel. The light grew dim. We decided to hurry down to that hotel while we could still discern our track among the boulders. Darkness came closing in on us now, it came from all sides, from above and below, it was like a living presence and the loose stones in our path were stubbing our toes, for we could no longer distinguish them. Every now and then Amy would stumble and fall, as her high heels tripped her up. She made no comment, nor ever once reproached me, she was one who, whenever a friend was concerned, would literally stick at nothing.

The path was only a dim thread now and darkness had nearly taken possession of the world, then it became wider and the gradient was less steep and we could see the lights of the hotel below us, twinkling like glow-worms. Our difficulties were over. Such was the unadventurous end of our first day's adventuring in the Lake country.

There was another occasion in my young days when I attempted, without any preparation for warmth or comfort, to sleep out in our garden beneath the stars. It was inspired by the chapter entitled 'A Night among the Pines' in Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*, but it was a secret attempt, made without any of his careful planning. Fully dressed, feeling like a burglar, startled by every creak of a stair or sound of my own footsteps, armed only with one blanket and a box of matches, I crept down after midnight, trembling with excitement, unlocked the back door and tip-toed out across the lawn to a huge rhododendron bush that had been hollowed out to make a flower bed and a sheltered place for sitting out in deck chairs. Several chairs were kept there in a corner and I drew out two of them and settled my head in one and my feet in the other. It would hardly be possible, I think, to find a more uncomfortable bed than a couple of those folding canvas chairs, for one's body, insufficiently supported on such props, feels like a series of disconnected lumps. Yet after a while I was able to forget my body.

I became merely 'something that listens' and all senses other than the sense of hearing were dulled. Yet there was no sound inside the circle of that evergreen bush, no sign of life from house or

garden, no stirring of any leaf nor hooting of any owl. The leaves had lost their individual shape and the silence around me was heavy as velvet; yet I was listening intently for it was a strange new silence such as I had never heard before.

It is not easy to describe that night experience. Once I was clear of the back door and had no more fear of being discovered, I was no more aware of my living parents, sleeping not a hundred yards away in the house, than if they had been stones. I was listening for the first time to the silence of the stars. Never before had I been alone with them.

Long before dawn I crept back to the house and into bed but not to sleep, for the walls had shrunk and I could hardly breathe. Neither of those attempts to sleep out of doors had lasted more than an hour or two and, from the physical point of view, neither had been successful, for the deck chairs had been extremely uncomfortable and the air on Sty Head Pass had been cruelly cold. I was still far from the mood of R.L.S. when he wrote :

I have not often enjoyed more strenue possession of myself, nor felt more independent of material aids. The outer world, from which we cower into our houses, seemed after all a gentle habitable place; and night after night a man's bed, it seemed, was laid and waiting for him in the fields, where God keeps an open house.

Yet both those nights of mine had been among the great adventures of life that lead one out from the narrow way of habit towards horizons incomputably distant. Thereafter, however trivial and limited the life of everyday might be, I would always keep, as a solid possession, that new sense of intimacy with the stars.

Since then I have so often lived vicariously, in books, with those who habitually or on many occasions slept in the open air, sharing the experience of hunters and poets, of explorers, adventurers and vagrants. Some of these sons of freedom relate how they just rolled themselves up in a blanket, making no mention even of a pillow, and slept until the dawn. The mere words 'lying under the stars' and 'waking with the dawn' always seemed to me like short lyrical poems conjuring up a whole blessed experience. It took me a long

time to realise that, in order to achieve freedom of the spirit in such adventures, the ordinary mortal must concede a certain amount of comfort to the body. How well did R.L.S. lay his plans for such freedom, thinking out every detail of his sleeping bag and fur cap and deciding, in case of heavy rain, to make himself, for his head only, 'a little tent or tentlet, with my waterproof coat, three stones and a bent branch'.

So many travellers touch lightly on the possible discomforts of sleeping out, or even ignore them altogether. Yet, after all, can they be ignored? What about the dew? And crawling insects? The possible shower of rain and the inevitable chill of the dawn hour? The stones beneath an aching body or, harder even than stones, the unrelenting sand? Were those travellers immune from the effects of all such things? I would ask myself that question again and again when, in later years, I slept in the open air at various times and places. I have slept on a haystack near the sea, with the winking gleams of a lighthouse for company and have learned that if you sleep on hay, however often you straighten your body out full length, the hay will give, until you find yourself coiled up in a basin. I have slept in an open boat, curled up between the thwart; on a heath in Holland; in passes among the mountains of Ireland; in Welsh valleys and on Cornish hills; and once, protected only by a mosquito net, beside the Alaskan river Porcupine.

Yet never when sleeping out did I achieve that complete forgetfulness of the body proper to anchorites, ascetics, explorers and all who turn their back on the easy way of living in order to hitch their wagon to a star.

Eventually I found I could attain forgetfulness of the body in quite another way; this was by the rhythm of walking. I would not willingly exchange my human legs for fins that cleave the water or wings that soar in air or muscles adapted for gigantic leaps like those of the kangaroo. Often I have found that worry, depression or even lassitude can be banished by the simple act of walking for a few miles. As for a whole day's walking, it can bring one, from the moment of setting out, the utmost contentment. There is no midday meal nor tiresome appointment demanding punctual return

nor undue hastening of one's footsteps. One's day is not cut into slices of time, it stretches ahead of us with a new-born benevolence and all the little trials of daily life are dispersed like a cloud of gnats.

There is nothing restless about the movement of walking when we have no set objective nor assignation. We can move steadily forward from one bend of the road to the next with ever-renewed delight, absorbed in the pursuit of something that may lie beyond the next curve or at the top of the next hill, for it is always possible that we may find there a whole new world, fashioned and completed after our heart's desire. Even walking in a flat country on a long straight road that appears to lead to the edge of our world may have a quite indescribable charm. The horizon is one receding mirage after another, luring us onward, and after a while we become lulled into an unwonted calmness, feeling that we have set out on a road which has no ending, that our way lies onward, onward into infinity.

Strangely enough this feeling of indefinite extension is not inimical nor frightening. While plodding along that level road one may be filled with happiness, desiring nothing more from life than to be thus moving slowly on for ever towards what is unknown. That was what I felt in later years, when wandering on the long straight roads of France, or in fen-land and such, I suppose, would be the sensations of those who walk alone in the desert, where the curve of the earth is the only boundary to their vision.

As for climbing mountains, I never could understand the viewpoint of those who denigrate the Everest heroes and their competitors. Surely mountaineering is human aspiration made manifest by bodily endeavour, human aspiration that remains a spiritual quality, with all its faltering and fortitude, its weakness and its strength, its moods of resolution or despair. In mountain climbing there is no unwonted calmness, there are alternating waves of hope and fear as, over and over again, the summit is viewed far overhead, beyond one lesser peak and another. There are steep gradients and pauses to take breath and gather energy, there are footsteps stumbling over pebbles and boulders on the track; a lesser summit is attained and

behold it is only a ridge, with a whole panorama of lesser summits between oneself and the mountain peak. A feeling of despair comes down like a cloud. How soon will this fearful expenditure of energy be exhausted? Is the peak a defiant spirit, resentful of human intrusion, or is it a lone incarnation of solitude?

At last the ridges are all below and between oneself and the true summit there is only a trackless chaos of boulders wherein the path has petered out like a brook in desert sand. The supreme moment is almost held in the palm of one's hand. One long breath, then onward slowly, over and between those boulders. Now at last there is no Beyond, there is only an Above of air and space and clouds.

When I stand on the topmost stone of a cairn all solid objects are subservient to me, yet I am hardly more important in this world of air and sky than a tuft of thistle-down. At any moment I may be blown off into space. I remain quite still, precariously balanced on the summit, feeling nearer to the sky than I have ever felt before.

Again and again I repeated such experience when climbing a mountain. Sometimes the summit was grass-grown but more often there was a jumble of boulders guarding the highest point, as if to provide one last obstacle for the intruder.

I never became a mountain climber in the true sense of the word and never once did I set forth in a party with rope and ice-axe and often when I climbed a mountain I climbed it alone. In due course I could number among my unforgotten friends Helvellyn, Scawfell and Skiddaw; Foinaven, Snowdon, Plynlimmon and Cader Idris; Rough tor and Brown Willie, Carantuoill, Slieve Donard and Slieve League; Mt Arrowsmith in Vancouver Island; Pine Mt and Double Mt in Queensland; Tognala and Rosetta in the Dolomites and the Wildspitze (11,000 feet) in Austria.

There was also Peristeri in Yugo-Slavia but the truth must be told about Peristeri. There was deep snow lying on its sides and when we found that it was more than knee-deep we gave up trying to reach the summit.

I cannot now remember when, nor even where, I first followed a long level road or climbed to the top of a mountain. I only know

that, at some early age, I became subject every year to an attack of what I term 'Horizon Fever'. In Cornwall we had no distant horizons and in our home-life we were provincially-minded; such enclosure of mind and body could only increase the longing to explore the wide, wide world, a longing which I always expressed, in my own thoughts, by the single word 'escape'. Sometimes in March, sometimes in April I would feel the onset of this malady that can only be likened to an attack of acute mental growing pains. There were moments when the longing to be up and away into unknown country would almost amount to physical distress. The fever fit was seasonal, instinctive, inevitable each year as the rising of the sap and there was no cure for it but patience or immediate travel.

After a time, when the leaves of the trees became heavy and dark in colour, the fever would die down even if I had not been able to allay it by travelling, but with the passing of the years and even after several adventurous journeys, the seasonal attack became, if anything, more rather than less intense. Sometimes, even when the sap was dormant in the trees, the fever would recur. The mere reading of a travel book, or listening to some traveller's tale would often reawaken a passionate desire to set off then and there and follow some open road to the world's end

CHAPTER 6

: A GODMOTHER :

Meanwhile, in those aimless years after school days, we have travelled far on the open road and among mountains towards that 1914 war which was to mark the end of an epoch with the finality of a guillotine.

They were aimless years; I had no settled job in life, nor even any definite work to give a hard core to my days, nor had I any clear ideal that could kindle my thoughts to action. I wanted, alternately, to be famous and to be great, to do something worth while with my life, to live, like Goethe, 'the whole, the good, the beautiful' but I was not religious enough to be a missionary and I could not fix my mind on any career that would fulfil my aspirations. Yet although those years seemed to be without purpose and design, they were not always and altogether empty and I was more fortunate than many of my contemporaries in that I had two outlets, experience of travel and visits to my godmother.

Year after year I was sent to stay with this godmother, a distant cousin, in Lincolnshire. These visits were never connected with any startling events but would always induce an ever-deepening sense of some inward and spiritual grace that shone like a light among the trivialities of her day by day life.

My 'chocolate godmother' as I always called her before I knew her, had only been a myth for many years, although she came to life each Christmas Day with the arrival of a large box of chocolates from Charbonnel and Walker. Then, soon after I was grown up, I was sent with my younger brother who was at that time a midshipman, to stay with her on a ceremonial visit. We were given many instructions about our behaviour and Harry was told never to bang a door or to use naval slang. However the visit to Hagnaby was never again regarded as a formal duty, in fact it became an annual treat and the memory both of that first stay with my god-

mother and of all subsequent ones remains with me as a precious possession.

A diary kept that year is concerned with details about the expenses of our journey, about fishing for trout in the godmother's brook that ran down from the garden into the fen country and with the weight of every fish that we caught. It also records the names of all the strangers whom we met at tennis parties and garden fêtes. It is crammed with facts but there is no mention of my persistent search for freedom; yet I know now that, in this Victorian, well-regulated household, I found freedom of thought and action for the first time. What remains in my mind now of the Lincolnshire scene is a sense of blue distance in fen-land and the Boston Stump rising up on the horizon like a finger of destiny; and scarlet poppies in cornfields; and the lines, apparently stretching away into infinity, of silver water in dykes and canals that harboured rare wild flowers; and, above all, the personality and the library of my godmother.

In that part of Lincolnshire, as I see it to-day, there was always high sununer, and the poppies in the corn were redder than blood and the corn was more golden than the age of dreams, and that blue mist, hanging over the fens, was always veiling the over-busy world. In that level country one felt close to heaven for the dykes were mirror to every cloud and to the blue of cloudless sky, the country never could be dull or self-contained for always it was reflector to something greater than itself. The long straight roads were beautiful, they went away and away, narrowing to a point where the known became the unknown without any demarcation line. The land was everywhere dead level, except for here and there a three feet rise in the road to cross some bridge that spanned a dyke; there were larks singing in the over-arching sky; there was peace and the freedom of space, for sky and mist were the only boundaries. On the northern side that fen country came to rest, like a tired wave, at the foot of the wold and those wolds fell gently, unfolding themselves downward, leaving behind their turbulent curves, to meet and melt into the quiet fen.

It was just where these two were united that my godmother's

house was set, surrounded by level lawn and the cedar tree and the red brick garden wall with its sweet-brier hedge and the tennis court and the trout stream.

My first impression of the godmother, Cousin Marion, was that she must always have had the same appearance. It was impossible to picture her as young, she had settled down into a static aspect and was now rather like a national monument. She was not good-looking but she was a very ornamental figure, with her rather prominent blue-grey eyes and a fresh complexion and beautifully arranged white curls. She was stout and seemed always to be encased in a great many garments and she moved about with thoughtfulness, never speaking a sharp word nor making a hasty gesture. She had always with her, like a bodyguard, an air of moderation and kindliness and dignity and I do not think that anyone would ever have banged a door or shouted in her presence.

She was already an elderly, childless widow when I first knew her and it was impossible to picture her as lively or slim or subject to excitement, or indeed, as anything but an extremely level-headed and kindly person, very set in her ways. Long ago she had been married to a good-looking well-bred nonentity who was an excellent shot and that, apparently, was his outstanding characteristic. She had added his name to her own and had brought him to live in the old home which she had inherited. He had died when young and now she always spoke of him as 'My dear Roger', in a tone of reverence. One could not help suspecting that it had been an arranged marriage and not a love match and that their union had hardly ruffled the surface of her well-organized life. She had never lived in any other home. She read habitually in six or seven languages, had a most retentive memory and a very gentle, tolerant form of wit. Sometimes her words would be like those of Dr Johnson but her touch was lighter than his.

After she was left alone she would break the monotony of her quiet existence by periodical visits to London, where her life would assume, quite peacefully, its own London pattern. She would rent rooms with a family butler attached to them, in Ebury Street, would receive old friends to lunch or to tea there and would go

out to visit them. She would also engage a Professor to give her lessons in the particular language that she was then studying, would see two or three of the best plays of the season and would visit the Royal Academy.

She was always dressed in heavy and rich black garments, even in summer. I can see her now, walking slowly round her garden thus attired, complete with cape or mantle, shady hat with a bow tied under the chin and a parasol; always accompanied by her beloved 'Dickie Dodo' the dachshund, who waddled beside her, adapting his own pace to hers.

Despite the family warnings about being careful not to shock my godmother, there was no question of reserve or fear in her presence, she was always thoughtful for and sympathetic with the young. She would hire a bicycle for me during my two or three weeks stay and I would be free as a bird in the long mornings that she devoted to her accounts and correspondence. She would arrange tennis-parties, sometimes taking me out to neighbours and sometimes giving the parties in her own home. Also she searched among her friends to find a congenial companion for me and having found one would always invite her to come over and stay for a few days during my visit.

I do not remember her ever talking much of what was due to people and to things, but this little word 'due' might well have been her motto. It certainly was the keynote to her character and all recognized debts, whether of money, respect, support, or even avoidance, would be punctiliously paid. She classified her neighbours with precision; there were county families and there were 'not quites' and there were outsiders, but she never failed in exquisite courtesy to all, regulating the frequency and the quality of her intercourse with people partly on the base of their origin but also with a certain regard to their merit and to their actual value in the community. As for the neighbours' point of view, they would treat her always with a deference like that due to royalty. On her arrival at a garden-party or function she would be placed in a prominent but shady position, on a fairly upright chair, with a footstool, from which she could hold court as each acquaintance or

friend came up to her in turn. Many of these neighbours thought of her, I am sure, as only solemn, dignified and stiff; you had to stay in her home to appreciate her kindness and thought for others and her unfailing quiet humour.

It is true that her humour had usually a touch of dignity, that she loved a good pun or a verbal felicity, that she was more addicted to quips than to hilarity, but her wit played over all life and time and space, informing her weight of knowledge with bright streaks, as of some precious ore in heavy matrix. She was well informed about current affairs but even her disapproval of certain rebels in the young generation was never harsh. She regarded the Women's Suffrage movement as unseemly exhibitionism on the part of the weaker sex but she would always speak of the violent acts of 'those dreadful women' with a twinkle in her eye, as one might refer to exploits of a mischievous child.

I have often wondered if Cousin Marion ever felt any depth of sorrow over the departure of her 'dear Roger' from her well-organized life, indeed it is hard to associate her in any way with the word 'depth'. She was wise and wide-sighted and very thorough, and gifted with a clear judgment, but there was neither acuteness nor subtlety in her mind which was more like a well-balanced tool than a pointed one. I cannot remember her ever showing any sign of passion, nor excitement, nor even enthusiasm, always her praise would be measured and her condemnation mild.

Perhaps all this was due to her being so consistently a product of her own generation. Had she in all her life ever let herself go? Had she ever run about bare-footed in the starlight, ever slapped her nurse or flouted her governess? Did she ever, at any time, long to jump over the moon, or did she ever dally with the notion of accepting some new theory at a tangent with all her carefully acquired convictions? I think not. No, there was nothing wild about my godmother but I owe her a great debt, for she approved and encouraged my love of books. My family regarded her with a certain awe, just because she knew so many languages and they, in their complete ignorance of the difference between brains and erudition, thought that she was a brilliantly clever woman. As a

matter of fact she was cultured rather than clever and it was her extreme thoroughness, application and perseverance, added of course to leisure and a genuine love of letters, that enabled her to store her mind so richly. Even when she was quite old she would enjoy her London seasons, going up for those few weeks in spring or early summer to stay in Ebury Street and to refresh her mind among friends and book-shops and theatres.

She encouraged me to read books that ranged from Shakespeare, including his minor plays, to Bernard Shaw, Milton, Henley, Ibsen, William Morris, Plutarch, Macaulay, Plato, Thomas Hardy, Canon Ainger and Charles Lamb, Rostand and Coventry Patmore and Fogazzaro. Gradually I began to realise that, without travelling far, she had attained her own particular kind of freedom in a wide thoughtfulness and a well-ordered life.

In that quiet home on the borders of fen and wold she lived an uneventful life for eighty years, enclosed by the red brick walls in an atmosphere of mildness and dignity. Her garden was a place in which you could live, day after day, with a feeling of happy security. It was not showy nor over-stuffed with plants, it was just a very pleasant place, full of scent and colour, set apart from the noise and movement of the world; the terraced gravel walk was only separated by a stone balustrade from the fields that stretched away into the fens, giving one an outlook towards open country and sky. Beside and behind the house there was a walled garden with roses and a sweet-brier hedge, and a cedar tree overspreading a well-kept lawn, and a small chapel among trees where she and her retainers attended service on alternating Sunday mornings and Sunday afternoons. At Hagnaby nothing ever seemed to move on towards futurity. Year after year when I went there I would find the place and people unchanged.

A late breakfast and a very late lunch gave her the long mornings in which, after dealing with her correspondence and household matters, she would interview her gardener, coachman and agent, sometimes walking down to the kitchen garden that was set apart from the house beside a small dark wood where pigeons were always crooning their contentment. Meanwhile I was free to go

fishing in the brook or to roam the country on the hired bicycle. The brook was a great attraction; it was a considerable stream with deep pools, it flowed past the kitchen garden through a belt of woodland and then, between open fields, out into the fenland where it still adjoined the Hagnaby property on one side, with a secondary road on the other. I spent hours beside that brook, fishing with a worm, watching the young moorhens, studying the habits of each fish in each pool, becoming intimate with the depth in every reach and the snags near every bend, supremely happy in my solitude. On the occasion when Harry and I were there together, we went down to the stream where it bordered the road and spent a blissful morning tickling trout. After a heated chase, during which I breathlessly obeyed his stentorian directions, I flipped the prize into his arms. It was the largest fish that we had ever caught. There was, at that time, no guile in us, so we took it in to my godmother and told her the whole story of its capture.

On seeing the fish she at once led us to the gun-room where the game-book and the scales were kept and seated herself at the big writing-table, pen in hand, while we weighed the trout. The scales recorded exactly two pounds. It was a record. No fish caught in the brook had ever weighed more than a pound and a half, not even the Admiral himself had ever landed anything so large. She was hesitating as she considered our story. Her love of sport was inherited, but so was her outlook on poaching and such-like tricks. Yet it was a two-pound trout. Her hesitation did not last long and she entered the fish in the book, adding, to satisfy the demands of her integrity, a little footnote about the methods of capture.

The Admiral was a grim cousin of her 'dear Roger'. He would pay her long visits, making himself thoroughly at home, fishing or shooting according to the season.

'I do like to have a man about the house, my dear,' she would say. 'I like to feel that the gun-room is occupied.'

In the evenings, during his visits, we played solo whist and he was far from lenient to any lapse of memory about the cards or to any lightness in the conversation. As for a revoke, that would call forth mutterings of anger only prevented by my godmother's gentle

presence from developing into an explosion of quarter-deck language. Sometimes his habitual taciturnity would become actual moroseness but she always suffered his moods with the utmost tolerance and sweetness of temper.

Now and then she would plan distant expeditions for her young visitors. On that first visit my brother and I were sent one day, with a female cousin who was half resident in the house, to Skegness for a long and happy afternoon. We enjoyed every side-show, taking aerial flights, glissading down a mock light-house on mats to land at the bottom in the arms of a mock-sailor, bumping into sacks as we hung by the hands on overhead wires, having cheap photos taken and developed while we waited, and watching the people. In that particular season every tourist was equipped with a Japanese sunshade and they all spent the day walking about slowly, eating ice-creams. We never saw the sea except when once we glimpsed between the jerry-built houses a line of brown mud or water stretching away into the sky.

At dinner that evening our cousin was deeply interested in hearing about every detail of the excursion. Skegness might offer her, personally speaking, no attractions, but after all it was part of her county and she appreciated it for what it stood for.

Another expedition was arranged for us with a neighbour who took us to Gibraltar Point on a day of spring tides. We remained there until the evening to watch that memorable high tide come in like a galloping horse, filling up the network of narrow channels in the mud so rapidly that in a few moments what had been a mere thread of water between yourself and the solid land behind you might become impassably wide. We were of course warned to come back from this level maze of dykes and channels in good time, but it was a terrifying sight to watch that tide flooding it from the North Sea while we stood, only a few feet above it, on the low green bank that guards fenland from the inroads of the ocean.

My young brother seldom went to Hagnaby after that happy visit because he had so little leave between one cruise and another but my elder brother went to stay there, usually for shooting parties, whenever he came home from Queensland. He and I, all through

our lives, felt much the same about many of the things that matter most, although we seldom articulated those feelings and I know that he felt exactly as I did about Hagnaby and Cousin Marion. We both found in our visits there a sense of peace, contentment and security that was denied to us elsewhere.

Among the happy moments of those Hagnaby visits there would always be the thrill of arrival. The fat coachman would meet me at Spilsby with the carriage and pair, for always two fat horses were sent to negotiate the hill connecting fen and wold, which was a mere slope compared with our Cornish hills. During that drive I would always enjoy the sure and certain sense of going forward to recurrent happiness. Of course no two visits ever did recur with exact similarity, for example I never again saw Skegness nor Gibraltar Point, but I would hug to myself the comforting conviction that all the usual activities would be unchanging and unchanged. There would be those long mornings when I was free to roam the country, bicycling along the level roads, exploring new dykes and side lanes and finding new wild flowers and always having, when I looked towards the south, the Boston Stump for landmark, outlined in blue mist; and once I found *Butomus umbellatus* in a ditch, the beautiful Flowering Rush with pink, cup-shaped flower-heads on a long stem. Always on my return with any such trophy Cousin Marion would produce her Bentham and Hooker or her Sowerby to verify the flower, for she knew much about flowers and stars and all the lovely things to which we look up or down, rainbows, eclipses and clouds, trees and flowers, mosses and ferns and even fungi.

There would be the trout-stream too and peaceful hours of fishing there and day-dreaming, though once the peace was broken by a mishap. I was standing on one of the piles that supported the bank beside a deep pool and was about to drop my line, when the pile gave way beneath me and I fell head over heels into three feet of muddy water. I arrived outside the cousin's window looking like a decayed wisp of rubbish, with a fishing rod that had snapped in two and no fish. When she realised what had happened she was distressed but, without any sign of agitation, she went straight to the dining room and poured me out a stiff glass of whisky. There

was no question of a hot bath in that house at any odd hour; a hot bath was a rite connected with the early morning and many cans of hot water carried upstairs and a hip bath in one's bedroom. When she learned that it was the Admiral's fishing-rod that I had borrowed and broken, she still showed no agitation, only a mild distress, but when he stood up to the loss like a good-tempered man her relief was obvious.

There would also be the pleasant tennis-parties, never too large but always friendly and homely, and then, on non-social afternoons, we would sometimes go for an ambling drive round the fens, just to enjoy the country and the summer air. The old cousin would be seated in the victoria behind the fat coachman and the fat horse, bolt upright, holding a parasol above her head and emitting a pleasant flow of local anecdotes and reminiscences. Her interest in Scandinavia had led her to study the Danish influence in Lincolnshire; she knew much about the place-names and was a member of some 'Viking' society. She read its literature carefully and sometimes would even join the day-excursions of her fellow-members to examine some antiquity. I often wished that I could have seen her fraternizing with these twentieth-century Vikings, for, stretch my imagination as I would, I could never picture her in such a crowd.

Sometimes on these drives she would call at Stickney rectory, to have a few words with her friend Hammer Hales, so-called because he had been the All-England champion for throwing the hammer. He was an enormous, brawny, red-faced man, more like a butcher than a parson in appearance but he was a good Rector and a good neighbour. The living was, I think, in my cousin's hands. At first I was a little surprised at her friendship with this coarse-looking man who would usually be found in shirt-sleeves working in field or garden. Later I realised that she respected his parochial work and was proud of his achievement with the hammer, and that she regarded him as a historic monument like the Boston Stump.

Then there would be blissful afternoons reading in a deck chair under the cedar tree. I would read one book after another that my cousin recommended and once she put into my hands a leather

note-book filled with her own careful and exquisite writing; it was a prose synopsis of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* that she had made at a time when no English translation had been produced. I handled it with reverence and read it with ever mounting excitement.

Under this same cedar it was that Scorchers drew blood from my godmother's old school-friend when she was snoozing peacefully one afternoon in her full length chair. She was a spinster of uncertain age and settled habits and no one ever took a liberty with her, except Scorchers. He was one of six brothers and sisters. There were Billy and Russet and Silver-tail and two more whose names I have forgotten. These red squirrels made free with the house and garden and at five o'clock in the morning Scorchers would come leaping in from the woods, run up the side of the house and in at my window and jump on to the bed; sometimes I would have two squirrels on my bed at the same time and I always had a store of nuts ready for them. At tea-time one of the boldest would come frisking through the French window into the drawing-room and seize a scone from the lowest plate on the cake-stand. Always, in the garden, one could hear them frolicking and chattering in the branches of the cedar. What part of the spinster's anatomy was assailed by Scorchers I do not now remember but I think it was her nose. The whole episode was discussed by my cousin with Johnsonian dignity, tempered by the suggestion of a twinkle in her prominent eyes, until the victim herself had to smile at the outrage.

A favourite excursion, repeated every year, was to the home of Olive, the congenial friend who had been found for me. Cousin Marion would sit and talk with the elders while we played tennis and once, when the Hagnaby visit took place in May instead of August, Olive and I wandered off to some enchanted woods. Nightingales filled that place with their daylight chorus and as we picked bunch after bunch of wild lilies-of-the-valley we found also flowers of the *Maianthemum*, that tiny plant with white flowers like frosted bubbles lined out singly on its three-inch stem.

My cousin was at her best with this family who had enough culture to approach her with appreciation rather than awe and she was on friendly terms with the old generation and the young

alike. The three sons all found favour in her eyes, one was a good-looking guardsman, one a hunting and shooting man and the third was a mild person who habitually attended Fungus club dinners and was occupied in writing a monograph on one particular species of fungus. Her attitude to these three, like her attitude to many of the people whom she knew, was that of some benevolent gardener who will recognize in every plant its distinctive scent or colour or property without invidious preference or comparison.

When Olive came to stay at Hagnaby she would bring her bicycle and we would explore the fens together. Once we got up early, long before the household was stirring and went off on our bicycles with the idea of having a refreshing bathe in one of the dykes. We chose a solitary place, which was not difficult since you can go many miles without coming to one of those cottages that are perched on the yonder side of a dyke, connected with the road only by a single-plank bridge. We laid our bicycles on the bank, stripped and stepped cautiously into the water, stirring up a depth of mud and producing a stench that might have emanated from primeval slime. We never tried bathing in the fens again.

On our next dawn expedition we set off towards the wolds and leaving our bicycles outside a gate we entered a copse by a grassy path and moved on to a clearing. Our feet were soaking wet in the dew. I could never find that copse again if I were set down now in Lincolnshire, indeed I wonder if it ever really existed in time and space, for I cannot remember the road by which we reached it and returned, nor the setting of the wood, nor the appearance of the trees; I have only, as a lasting possession, an impression that the spirit of summer was reigning in that place where we stood on the dew-drenched grass beside a whole world of pink champions. We had a 'fulness-of-plenty' sensation, derived from the freshness of the air, the silver dew and that profusion of pink blossom. Was it the apotheosis of summer? We stood there hushed, as if a god were holding audience. Sometimes now I ask myself what directed our steps to that wood on that irrefragable morning and wonder if summers before or after ever held that miracle.

Usually at the end of a Hagnaby visit I would have to leave by

: A Godmother :

an early train and would be summoned to my godmother's bedroom to say good-bye while she was in the middle of dressing. I have a collective memory of those good-byes when she would be always standing in a vast number of petticoats, or so it seemed to me, with her white curls all in order and her dress waiting ready on a chair. She would always bid me an affectionate good-bye and would press a golden sovereign into my hand. Those sovereigns were the least valuable part of all that she gave me during the years when I knew her.

The old home is gone now. It passed into other hands and, as a consequence of legal muddles and succession duties, it had to be pulled down and sold. I should like to know if they cut down that dark square of trees behind the kitchen garden, where wood-pigeons always nested, crooning out from that dim place their lullaby of inmemorial peace.

Strangely enough when I picture the house and garden now it is always bathed in summer sunshine. I cannot recall a wet day nor a stormy one at Hagnaby. There was always peace, too, in my godmother's home. There was also, in her quiet life, a spaciousness that we lack to-day in our over-crowded hours.

CHAPTER 7

: TRAVELS :

As for the other high-light in those aimless years, experience of travel, both my sister and I were fortunate. She went twice to Queensland for a three months stay and nearly every winter to visit hunting friends in Kilkenny, travelling by pig-boat from Falmouth because it was the cheapest route. For my part I went to South Africa, Queensland, Switzerland, Ireland, Venice and the Orkneys. All these journeys were unexpected, like windfalls, except the one to Venice which was planned and premeditated for years.

We were by no means a rich family and we lived always up to our income yet our journeys were more frequent than those of our richer neighbours. I was continually surprised by the stay-at-home habits of these people, for in those days I firmly believed that when money *was* dropped from heaven it was dropped so that we might buy many books and see many countries.

Whenever I travelled with the family the experience left no deep impression on me. They were purposeful journeys that we took, with length and breadth, that is to say with planned duration of time and confines of locality, but they brought no wider vision nor deeper understanding of the things that matter most in life. To travel with one's family was like moving through a picture gallery, passing on from one coloured object to another with superficial attention. It was like picking flowers that would soon be faded by time.

Many years later I understood that only in self-chosen travel, alone or with one closely understood companion, is one able to strike roots and to gain rich experience. Only under such conditions may one find in unknown places that sudden happiness of feeling at home in the universe, endowed with a sixth sense that is a sense of complete unity with some object, large or small. It may be the Coliseum in Rome or St Mark's in Venice or the Acropolis

above Athens; a mirage in the desert, the abysmal funnel-shaped chasm of water beneath one's own ship in a cyclone, the snow-clad peak of an inaccessible mountain, the black clouds of a thunderstorm; or it may be a single flower, a shell, a little valley or a little hill, a boulder on a moorland, a leaf on a tree, the spots on a ladybird, the furred back of a bumble-bee; it may be any visible token of the power behind birth and life and death. In such illumined moments one's own self is lost as a separate self, having become merged in the thing seen and they are always moments of excitement followed by calm.

The first of my journeys was made at the expense of a rich uncle who thought I would be a suitable companion for his sister, that widowed, religious aunt who ate stewed prunes every Sunday. She was going to Cape Town for a month to meet her son who, instead of making money in Johannesburg, was losing it to unscrupulous Jews. This cousin of ours must have been fair game to the Jews; he had failed to keep any job at home, the last one being that of a clerk in a bank that had sacked him because he had not enough natural spittle to lick the stamps and there was nothing else he could do; or that, at any rate, was the story circulated in the family.

The aunt was never happy. She thirsted for ship's gossip about her fellow-passengers but was too shy to acquire it and when she did extract tit-bits from me she was jealously annoyed because she had not been the one to collect them. There was also her religion. Every morning before breakfast I had to follow her down interminable alleys and gangways to the third class deck where the Methodist Captain read prayers. There was worse to follow. On our first Sunday she had loaned me to the Captain to play his harmonium at Children's Service in his cabin. I arrived before the children and he at once asked me if I was saved. I knew quite well that I was not but I did not wish to discuss my religious scepticism with this stranger. Seldom have I passed a more miserable five minutes but at last the children arrived, putting an end to his harangue and my silence.

Among the passengers I had found some friendly people and it was a humiliating moment when I had to introduce my cousin to

them on the quay at Cape Town. He was a harmless young man, wearing a very large felt hat on his enormous head, he had kindly brown eyes, a receding chin and a paunch; he spoke habitually through his nose and his vocabulary was very small.

We stayed in a hotel outside Cape Town near some lovely vineyards. One could over-eat on grapes for twopence. Sometimes the aunt would make excursions with us but she could never abandon herself to impressions of beauty in the mountain scenery, being always critical of small discomforts and the red dust that seeped into one's skin and clothes. She had no natural *joie-de-vivre*. On excursions with my cousin he was always preoccupied with keeping accounts of every penny for bus fares, charging half to me and half to his mother for himself. Once we found blue water-lilies on a pond and he held my shoes while I waded into the water to pick them. And once I escaped, with some acquaintances, to walk half way up Table Mountain and we found flowers of the blue Diza.

Little else remains for me now of that journey except a mental picture of the willow on Napoleon's grave at St Helena, stripped of nearly all its leaves by American souvenir-hunters; and another picture of the bleakness and aridity of the slopes on Ascension Island behind those tanks where the turtles lived and yet another picture of my first landfall, when we called at Madeira on the outward voyage. Slowly, slowly something in the distance took shape, it was more solid than a cloud, an interruption to the level water that had imprisoned us for days. It became a hill and on the side there was a single object like a pale sheep that grew and grew until it became a haystack and gave me a sudden vivid sense of the vastness of the sea's expanse and the swiftness of our own movement. I remember also whole hours spent among the third class passengers in the stern of our vessel, watching the flight of albatrosses. Those were timeless hours, short as a minute or long as eternity, hours during which I was completely lost in the movements of the birds which, in their continuous flight, gave an impression of perfect poise and stillness.

The next journey was not propitious for such moments of lost identity as those I have described, moments that I was beginning to

regard as my birthright. Such experiences could not answer the two recurrent enigmas of life, Whence and Why, but they could and did allay my restlessness. If only I were able to enter momentarily into evil forms as well as good, if I could lose all sense of self in a crocodile, a murderer, a mosquito, what might I learn? Everything perhaps. Yet it usually seemed as if beauty must be the key-word to that hidden world.

We set out for six months stay in Queensland, my father, mother, sister and myself, with a Cornish maid and a vast amount of luggage that included a hat-box large as a small arm-chair. More vivid than anything else is the memory of my mother insisting that we must wear heavy gauze veils over our solar topees on every occasion, in order to preserve our complexions. My sister, it is true, had a pink and white face but mine was always yellow and I resented this futile care for its preservation, while the gauze made me feel as if I were wearing fetters.

I remember also my mother's thinly veiled antipathy to the country and the people. This was by no means her first visit, indeed three of us had been born in Queensland, but now whenever she set foot on shore, in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Rockhampton, strangers would accost her with a drawling enquiry: 'Well, Mrs Rogers and how do you like Australia?' She would always reply, with an inimitable tilt of the chin: 'I *mean* to like it'. Only we ourselves could read the full meaning of that tilted chin, the mood of condescension and slight contempt that it betokened and we could only hope that the gesture was lost on strangers.

Yet there were moments, later, when she rose gallantly to the occasion of entertaining my father's friends. The nearest town to our cattle station was 120 miles away; we lived at the sea end of a peninsula and of the single road by which we had arrived, so that calls from neighbours were infrequent. One evening six miners, clad in grubby dungarees, complete with blankets and old-fashioned blunderbusses, appeared suddenly on the verandah. They had come by boat from an island ten miles out and they were actually our nearest neighbours. We welcomed them for the night

as a matter of course. They all sat down to the evening meal in shirt sleeves and we ate, as usual, salt beef and sweet potatoes and oranges. One very stocky individual had a Herculean chest and the black stripes on his pale shirt were quite two inches apart. Their talk and the sing-song after supper when one of them vamped accompaniments on our ancient piano, were full of gusto and I found it quite entrancing. My mother was inwardly outraged but she never batted an eyelid and dispensed her hospitality as if they had been dukes.

On another occasion a certain Mr O'Grady arrived for the night from a station a hundred miles away. After eating a hearty supper he patted his stomach and said, in confidential friendly tones, as he turned to my mother: 'Mrs Rogers do you ever suffer from a sense of fulness on the chest after your meals?' I forget her reply but I remember that, once again, she retained her dignity.

We enjoyed, of course, good moments when riding with my father and brother and the men, mustering cattle on the plain or among the gum trees; watching bird life, black swans in the lagoons among blue water-lilies, or blue, green and red parrots flashing overhead in flocks, or native companions standing five feet high, moving slowly with a stilted and stately walk, or lemon-crested cockatoos. There were long days fishing in the creeks or from the black-toothed rocks on which we would stand looking out to the island of the Great Barrier Reef across a turquoise sea that was always calm. Once or twice there were drives by buggy or buck-board, with a pair of horses or four-in-hand, to a neighbouring station some hundred odd miles distant for a race meeting which always lasted several days. There was a vigour and vitality about the people whom we met, as if they moved in a higher gear than ourselves. I think that they were less inhibited, but at that time I had never heard the word 'inhibited' and I only felt that life on an Australian cattle station was, from the outward point of view only, full of new experience.

In the inarticulate recesses of my being I felt that there was nothing that mattered very much in that Australian journey. We had seen the Southern Cross and other new stars, we had seen

many strange cities and people and things, looking on the outward face of them all, but I had not struck any deep roots in what we call 'Life' and I had not gained much in understanding.

My first visit to the continent was, also, under parental control. I went with my mother to Switzerland, our expenses being paid by the generous uncle. My mother had a passion for getting up high in the Alps, by any or every method except walking, in order to see Alpine flowers growing in their natural haunts. She would go to some comfortable hotel near the snow-line, in a locality that had been recommended by her horticultural mentor M. Correvo of Geneva.

We went for a few days to Montreux and then up to Montana by rail and finally by horse-drawn conveyance. There she settled into her Swiss routine of breakfast in bed, an idle morning until the arrival of the post and then, after lunch, a walk or scramble in search of flowers. Each evening she would be absorbed in her Alpine flower books, verifying the names of her trophies. Never before nor after did I see her relaxed and able to live in the present, for most of her life was spent, like that of our old friend the Red Queen, in 'faster, faster' movement, trying to anticipate the next moment and the next. She was always like a watch fully wound up. When she had exhausted the flora near Montana we went down to the Rhone valley again and thence up the Turtinann valley to a little mountain hotel. My mother was carried in a sedan-chair by four porters who staggered up the rough and stony track for quite four hours. She was highly indignant when, two or three times, they insisted on stopping at some wayside house for five minutes rest and a pourboire. I walked on ahead or in her wake. She was only fifty-four at that time and perfectly healthy. It is strange to think that, at the age of sixty-seven, I was destined to walk down the Rhone, some 450 miles from glacier to delta.

When we arrived at the mountain hotel which was clean but scantily furnished, with bare boards in every room, we found that the light had failed and the place was lit by candles; moreover at supper the soup was very nasty. She took an instant dislike to this lodging and decided at once to return to the flesh-pots of Montana,

so after two nights in that wonderful high place down we came again, my mother reluctantly dispensing money for pourboires as before.

I would have given much to stay longer at the head of that Turtmann valley but our one day there was memorable. I took out a picnic lunch and went climbing up towards the snow with a German girl, a fellow guest at the Inn of the Dismal Soup. We stopped near the snow-line in a divinely beautiful spot where she at once unwrapped a plaid shawl that she had been carrying, took out from it some extremely fat cold sausages, settled herself on the shawl and began to eat with full attention to that business but never a glance at the scenery. I was standing quite still when this happened, petrified with joy, for at my feet there were gentians in full flower. I often think how lovely it would be if one could go through life recapturing first moments of any perfect experience but fate seems to have decreed that, in repetition, a happiness can never be quite the same. Since then I have seen gentians in many lands and many gardens but none had the same magic as those flowers seen, for the first time, in their own wild home.

Another experience of that month in Switzerland was at once a landmark, a revelation and an ecstasy. One morning at Montana I had escaped alone from the hotel and was climbing up through the fir woods. The scent of resin was a richness in the air. I came out into an Alpine pasture full of flowers and bright sunlight, where in the atmosphere was a tang of something indescribably fresh, something that I had never yet smelt nor tasted. Just to stand and draw in a long breath of air was like having a delicious drink. There was absolute silence. The flowers that were like brilliant cups or stars in the grass; the fir-trees enclosing that pasture and holding their own dark shadows; a snow-peak overhead seen in a glimpse between the dark tree stems; all these seemed to be frozen into immobility, as if they were too beautiful to come under the law of change. I moved on upward, slowly, through the forest, putting one foot carefully before the other so as to make no sound, holding my breath in deference to that stillness, until after a while I came out into another pasture where, suddenly, the silence was broken by separated notes

of music that came dropping from above. There was a cool purity about them, as if individual snow-flakes had fallen from the peaks to become, each one, a gently tinkling bell.

I would set off for the world's end tomorrow if there were any hope of recapturing there the essence of that moment when I first heard cow-bells in an Alpine pasture.

The next journey abroad was made with a cousin of my father who was ten years older than myself. I had a school-girlish admiration for her but I came to realise, later, that she was a somewhat shallow and neurotic person with a quick, and superficially clever mind. Unfortunately for me when she was staying with us in my teens, she was ten minutes late for dinner one evening and my father refused to invite her again for many years; he was a very even-tempered man but he was the soul of punctuality and the lack of it was, he felt, almost a crime. Meanwhile my infatuation was kept alive by occasional visits to her impecunious family and I saved up money, pound by pound, until there was enough to give us both a whole month in Venice. We travelled second class and stayed in a small pension in a side street off the Grand Canal. She had been to Italy before and her dilettante knowledge of painting, sculpture, history and literature seemed to me wonderful. She had also a parrot-like memory that retained both significant and trivial details; sometimes she would stop on a bridge and retail the whole conversation that we had held on the previous day while we were approaching that bridge, while we were standing with our arms on the parapet and then when we had moved on into the next street.

Both of us had read many books about Venice and I had traced out a map marking on it the most important churches and monuments. So day after day, with this map in hand, we would wander through the narrow streets to our objective, a picture gallery, or a church or an open square that held a statue.

We stood in rapt admiration before Santa Barbara, clad in rich crimson robes that were glowing among permanently gathered shadows. We entered a church to find the sacristan who pulled aside a curtain from the altar to show us a Cima da Conegliano portraying the baptism of Christ, a picture in which, for all my

inexperience, I could recognize a tenderness and depth of feeling that I had never seen in any other painting. We visited the Carpaccio pictures to note their details with impassioned interest; each scale of the dragon and the threatening angle of St George's lance and St Ursula's little red slippers beside her bed. Sometimes we would spend an hour or two in the Accademia, always discovering new pictures to admire and then going back to others that had become, after a while, familiar friends. In one large Italian canvas there was a certain old beggar woman for whom we had a great affection; she was seated in a corner, with her basket beside her, below the stone steps leading to a temple. We always went close up to her, indifferent to her immemorial stillness and to the crowd of other figures in the picture, to give her inarticulate greeting, almost hoping for a reply.

There was one Madonna of Giovanni Bellini whose face held, surely, a serenity that no man ever could attain, but however earnestly we gazed at her she never yielded any of her secrets. We loved best of all the Titian Holy Families and after looking long at the brilliant colour of their draperies, we would sit down to rest our eyes on the little landscapes in the background, where sunlight and distance were sublimated in a blue atmosphere to a scene that always awoke our wanderlust; a river would be flowing in a valley beneath a little hill and a road would be winding up that hill to a castle on the height and that was the valley and the road and the hill where, of all places in the world, we would like to be.

Also we spent many hours gazing at the bright bead necklaces and leather goods and glass in the shops of the Merceria, or sitting in the Piazza San Marco, sipping coffee, hypnotized by the gold façade of the church, listening to the flutter of pigeons' wings, watching the faces of many nations in the crowd that paced slowly to and fro in the great square or beneath the arcades, always moving at an even pace, for there was no hurry in Venice. Sometimes we made excursions in a gondola; once we went across the lagoon to the mournfully beautiful island of Torcello and saw the vast mosaic Madonna, black on her gold background, in the dome of the church that towers, lonely now and unconcerned with our mortality.

standing up like a monolith in its waste of lagoon and marshy land. There were days too when we would go to the wide spaces of the Lido to drink in fresh air and to clear our minds of the crowded impressions that we had gathered. For both of us it was an enchanted month, leaving, when it was all ended, a permanent, rather rich impression of happiness that we could not forget. For the first time in my life I had spent whole weeks in the pursuit of beauty, in a search that was single-hearted and rapt as that of any star-gazer.

There was another journey, a very different one, made a few years later with a middle-aged cousin of my mother. She had always been kind to me, often I had stayed in her Cornish home above a tidal estuary where, at intervals all through the night, I would hear the cries of curlews and redshanks coming up from the mud flats below the garden. Sometimes she would take me on day-long expeditions to the coast in search of wild flowers. She was a very quiet, peaceful person and one summer, when she had lately married a man of the same type of mind as her own, they invited me to go with them to the Orkney Islands on a bird-watching expedition. An undergraduate nephew of his was to be the fourth person in the party.

Before we started I spent two days with the cousins in their Yorkshire home and my first impression of him was that he seemed to be fierce and alarming. He was an immensely tall man with a long neck and a concentrated look in his eyes that looked out from behind thick glasses. Before his marriage he had been generally regarded as a woman-hater and a man given to impenetrable silences and even now I noticed that he never spoke at all unless he had something worth while to say. Uncle and nephew were both keen naturalists. The nephew hardly ever spoke, except sometimes when he would arrive at breakfast full of enthusiasm about some dead vole that he had in his pocket, a new species to him. Did he spend all his nights in vole-hunting? We never knew. My cousin herself had always been a silent person. Seldom have I enjoyed an expedition so much as the one I shared with these three mutes. It is true that I was alarmed when, during the first evening in York-

shire, the Husband had remarked into his soup : 'The worst of taking women bird-watching is that after sitting still for three hours or so they'll want to sneeze or blow their nose'. I thought to myself : 'Whatever shall I do? I cannot become Lot's wife'. I pictured myself spoiling the whole party by an unavoidable sneeze. However all was well, for I soon discovered that he was a most benevolent and kindly man, a well-read, nature-loving personality who balanced his life well between thought and action and could, on occasion, be the most delightful talker.

'Judge not that ye be not judged,' I said to myself, as soon as I had made these discoveries, but all through the subsequent years, in spite of constantly quoting that text to myself, I never really learnt its lesson.

His main object in the Orkneys was to find the nest of the twite, or mountain-linnet, but we did not spend the whole time pursuing this search, all four of us together. We made our headquarters first at Stromness, then at Kirkwall, and the men would sometimes leave us for a few days and go off in an open boat to one of the lesser islands where conditions were supposed to be too rough for women. Meanwhile R. and I would potter happily about the coast and beaches and swamps, and the stately ring of ancient stones at Stenness. We enjoyed the sight of squat-looking, comfortable eider-ducks, riding low in the water of sea inlets, and of familiar wild flowers all more brightly coloured than they were at home; even the pink colour of the common campion was luminous, invested with alien brilliance by the clarity of the northern light that emanated from open spaces and from the wide expanse of sky, lasting long after ordinary daylight hours.

There were strange new flowers too and once, on a red-letter day, we found the glaucous blue *Mertensia maritima* rooted in a golden sand-bank.

In the Orkneys, as in Venice, all our days were spent in the pursuit of beauty. There was one most memorable afternoon when we all four went for a cruise round the noble, upstanding island of Hoy, a strange rock, powerful and lonely and aloof, with the angry sea breaking in wave after wave of white foam at its base.

: Travels :

There are in the world certain places, usually uninhabited places, that give us very powerfully an impression of 'I have been here before'. My friend D. assures me that such places make a cosmic belt round the world, and that she or I or both of us should connect all such moments when we had such experience and make a full map or history of the cosmic belt. When she says 'map or history' I think she is merging our notions of time and space and I cannot follow her. I feel that she has entered some other dimension. I only know that now and then, most often when alone, certainly among very ancient stones and always whenever I have been fortunate enough to reach some place never trodden by human foot, I feel a deep sense of recollection, nostalgia and achievement all strangely mingled. Such experience goes further than losing one's identity in admiration of a single object, it is, I feel sure, a sense of one's own lost unity with nature and while it lasts the time and space of the little thing that we call 'to-day' have no existence. Yet always, too soon, that recollection will fade, that sense of achievement will vanish like a dream and only the nostalgia will remain.

Actually I was not alone when I was leaning on the gunwale of our boat that pitched and rolled in the surging sea at the base of Hoy, but in the presence of those three peaceful companions I could think my own thoughts and indulge my own feelings. I was conscious of nothing but that black island rock and I know now that if there is a cosmic belt round the world, then the lonely rock is a link in the chain.

I also know that during that solitary walk in Ireland when I set out northward, I had felt a sense, so often experienced since then in parts of Ireland, of being absorbed into some very ancient silence that was itself alive as a listening presence. Perhaps D. is right. Perhaps there is a cosmic belt. Perhaps when tossing about in a boat under the lee of Hoy, when walking away from Malahide in the Irish mist, when sitting near the snow-line in that Alpine pasture, I had unknowingly entered the circle. Perhaps the writing of this book is the outcome of a half-conscious search for traces of the cosmic belt.

CHAPTER 8

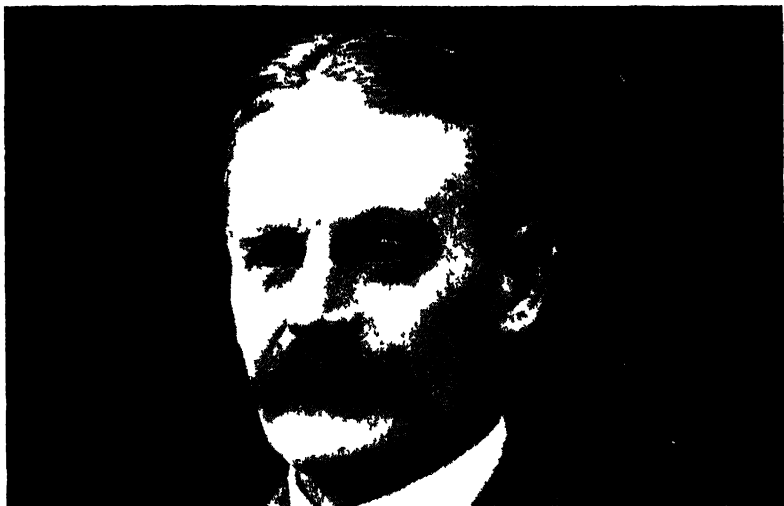
: LONDON SCENES :

So we drifted on through the years of our youth, undirected as thistledown; but by no means so productive.

I was not any nearer to following Goethe's dictum about living in the whole, the good, the beautiful, and my vague missionary yearnings, unsupported by any rooted faith, had never driven me forth to the activity of good works. Yet all the time I was nursing a desire to do and be something worth while. I had not yet discovered the nature of that something.

There was writing of course, always in the foreground and the background of my thoughts. I was continually studying great writers of all times and many nations and whenever I met any person or saw any natural object that stirred my imagination I would try to frame it, as a picture, in words. But I had set my mind on writing well and my books, I decided, must have the wisdom of Plato, the clarity of R.L.S., the organ-music of De Quincey, the mellow cadences of Plato and the poetic force of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yet whenever I re-read my written fragments, I found them wordy and jejune. Gradually, for home life was not a soil in which ideas could germinate freely, I decided that some day, like Nadia and her friends, I would go and work in the London slums. To mention either of these secret desires to my parents would have been no easier, I thought, than to jump over the moon. Then quite suddenly a way was opened. Another family journey to Queensland was imminent and my mother asked me if I would like to go out there again or stay with relations in England. I could see that she did not much care which alternative I chose and I took my chance in both hands.

'As a matter of fact,' I said very slowly, 'what I would really like to do -' I paused and took a long breath. I can still see the library in which we were sitting, the book-shelves reaching up to the



The author's father, Edward Powy, Rogers



he author's mother, Charlotte Rogers

ceiling, the big writing table, the windows and chairs and the sofa, and I remember that my own voice sounded hoarse and was like the voice of a stranger drumming in my ears. 'What I would really like to do,' I went on, and then it came out in a rush, 'is to go and work in the slums in London.'

It was over. The skies did not fall.

I think my mother realised in that moment something that she had long since suspected; her ugly duckling would never become a social swan. At any rate the plan was discussed as a possibility and later on duly modified. I wanted to go to the Women's University Settlement for the student's course of three terms. My mother, however, insisted that I should live in some place recommended by a clergyman and after various enquiries a 'Hostel for Ladies' was found in Pimlico. Then it was decided that I should work, to begin with, for the Charity Organization Society. My mother had heard of the C.O.S. as a very respectable corporation that did not dispend money without making adequate enquiries.

She was terrified of independence for her offspring. I always felt that she regarded independence as the first step on the downward path taken by those who become 'fallen women'. At any rate there I was, in due course installed in a clerically-recommended women's Hostel in Pimlico, pledged to work five and a half days a week, voluntarily, at the C.O.S. office in Marylebone where the Head, one Miss Macwilliam, was a friend of Nadia's. The cleric who recommended that dingy and dusty Hostel must surely have been a bachelor but the rather sordid atmosphere and the absence of elementary comforts had no importance for me. I had taken the first step towards freedom and my days were no longer aimless, they were full, almost overfull sometimes. We cleaned our own shoes and made our own beds but if we went away for the week-end we were refunded part of the rent.

We were not given latch-keys but our midnight morality was guarded by a person of a certain age who performed during the day some part-time menial occupation at the back of the Hostel. We would write our names in a book if we wished to be out until twelve o'clock and this person, who had a raddled face and a

chronically tired air, would admit us, return to the glass-fronted office-den where she kept her vigil, cross out our names and receive her due of twopence per head. We never discovered if those pence went toward the Hostel upkeep or were spent on gin for that weary watcher. Among the inmates were a few elderly retired governesses who monopolized the fireside chairs with ferocity during the winter. The young people consisted of typists, clerks and students, with one rather aimless creature who was always known as 'The Artist' although she had, as yet, produced no pictures. With my total inexperience of young people who earned their own living I looked on my companions as courageous pioneers who were many stages ahead of me in their journey through life, but I was soon on friendly terms with several of them and discovered with surprise that they were very businessy persons. A little group of us would spend our spare time in exploring the East End and various aspects of the seamy side of London which were out-of-bounds for all our conventional friends and relations.

There was not much spare time. Every day I would walk from Pimlico to Marylebone, filled with the exuberant kind of energy that Conrad, a few years later, immortalized in *Youth*. I worked all day, reading case-papers or sorting them in the office, paying visits in the slums round Edgware Road and Lisson Grove. The C.O.S., as I soon realised, did not believe in spending money on wastrels, however sad their history, however pitiful their condition might be. Those who could be reformed or helped to a position of security were granted relief, after an investigation that might have emanated from the Spanish inquisition.

To sit down opposite an applicant and gain the required information indirectly, without provoking his resentment, was a severe test of tact and memory. One could not possibly remember all the items needed to complete those dreadful case-papers; occupation, wages, rent, address, all these duplicated to cover past and present; family, ages, employers' references, sources of income if any; such were only a few of the headlines. Many questions had to be direct ones. One or two answers might be captured and set down, unknown to the applicant, while one listened to a sad story and pretended to twiddle

one's pencil idly on the blotting pad. Sometimes the applicant would get up and leave the room in a fury. Little by little, however, the human interest of the work obsessed me and in time I realised that when the C.O.S. did give help it had made certain of its foundations and could assure subscribers that their money was well spent. That, I think, was the strong point of the society; the weak point was that so many pitiful stragglers were left behind in the race for security and comfort.

Every day, after lunching quickly and inadequately on buns at an A.B.C. and snatching, at tea-time, a cup of tea and a biscuit in the office, I would stay late to help the chronically overworked Miss Macwilliam. Then I would walk back to Pin Lico, still full of youth's inexhaustible energy, blissfully happy, living in each moment of each day. If there were time before supper I would linger in Hyde Park so as to be for a while in the company of trees, for deep down in my heart I was a little homesick for green things.

Our evening explorations of London life led me and my companions to strange places but none were so strange as our ill-fated visit to Lambeth Walk.

It was the first time in my sheltered life that I ever felt any direct impact from a world event or a world movement; usually these were just things that one read about in the newspapers. Now, without any warning, half a dozen of us, complete like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with our hosen, mantles and other garments, found ourselves in a fiery furnace as it were, in the very heart of repercussions from the Suffragette movement.

The Artist had heard that Saturday night market in Lambeth Walk was a colourful scene. so there we were, six of us, setting out one evening after supper in our shabbiest clothes so that we could mix unobserved with the costers. Lights were shimmering across the darkened river as we threaded our way across Lambeth Bridge, but on the other side there was a sudden change when we passed under the railway bridge and followed streets that were dark and still until we saw lights ahead and came into Lambeth Walk. A glare of torches, a babel of voices, a blaze of colours; oranges, tomatoes, beetroot, gorgeous handkerchiefs, red meat, celery, watercress, cheap

clothing, yellow daffodils, rattles, false flowers were ranged in booths on each side of the street. In the middle there was a sea of faces. Such faces! The nearest one was the face of an old, old woman with pendulous cheeks and on the bottom gum a single tooth. Gipsy faces with bright eyes and red neckerchiefs looked out from the booths and from the open shops; faces wan and peaky; faces distorted and unwashed; faces humorous and coarsely jovial; all betraying a knowledge of life. There was not one innocent nor child-like face, every one of these people must have felt the grip of hardship or misery or sin.

Following one street and then another we pushed and elbowed our way through the throng, slithering about on the refuse that bestrewed the pavement. The Artist darted into a cheap clothes shop, attracted by the colours of the cotton handkerchiefs. 'Come along and see me and my brother, we're fine chaps,' said the man in shirt sleeves as he went behind the counter to change her shilling, 'Come along and talk to me,' said his brother, a greasy Jew at the back of the shop.

'Got something better to do,' said the Artist, trying to speak with a cockney accent and knotting the scarlet square round her neck.

'There's sixpence for you,' said the first man, returning, 'now run along and buy a tie for 'Arry.'

We wandered on discussing the prices of goods on the booths, intensely interested in the crowd and the shops and their wares. 'Don't shake yer 'ead so, yer'll never get the 'air to grow on it,' called out an unshaven man with a keen face. We all bought cotton handkerchiefs, purple, red or green, and tied them round our necks; we felt gay and happy wearing those bright colours. Everyone called out facetious greetings to us. It did not occur to us that we were attracting too much notice. Every now and then an urchin would point at us and cry: 'See the Suffragettes!' and after a while we noticed how persistent this cry had become and realised that we had collected a following of boys large and small.

'What 'are you doin' 'ere?'

'Picking up acorns?'

'This ain't the way to Piccadilly!'

'See the Suffragettes!'

These remarks began to have an insulting tone and our retinue pressed closer and closer, so we turned to retrace our steps and by the time we had reached the first street corner it was becoming unpleasant. Four of us had lost the other two. Everyone in the street was looking at us, small boys began to push and slap us on the back and the crowd only laughed. 'We'd better go straight home,' said one of us. 'Right,' said the others and we entered the dark, silent streets, hoping to shake off our tormentors there. Our hopes were vain. The slaps became thumps, the pushing became kicks, the crowd swelled every moment. The greetings had now become a chanted refrain: 'Oh the Suffragettes, we like to see them run!' This was sung over and over again with variations.

We were determined not to run. It was nearly a mile back to the other side of the river and there was no policeman in sight. Suddenly the Artist felt a stone thrown at her shoulders and her glasses fell off; she put them in her pocket and I took her firmly by the arm, for without her spectacles she was blind as a bat. 'Keep up your dignity,' I said. At that moment I felt a piece of filthy newspaper smacked across my face. We knew that if we ran or showed fight half of South London would be at our heels, so we kept up a slow and even pace. Stones and mud were volleyed at us from the rear and either side as we came to Lambeth Bridge; I clutched the arm of the Artist more firmly and held on my own hat with the other hand and our two companions came arm in arm behind us. Our persecutors were not only boys, for girls had joined the party and three or four men from a public house. They were pulling at our skirts now, trying to trip us up, picking up dishcloths or handfuls of refuse from the gutters, hurling them at us with well-directed aim. We kept up our slow and steady pace. Our faces were caked with mud, our hats were askew and our hair falling loose down our backs. We longed to spit at the rabble but we remembered our dignity and our hopelessly outnumbered condition and we kept on over the bridge, looking up hopefully at the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben.

Suddenly we saw something far more important than those

national monuments, the figure of a policeman at the far end of the bridge. Our first impulse was to run forward and fling ourselves into his arms; then, looking at each other, we realised that we no longer had the aspect of law-abiding citizens, for our faces were black, the ribbons of our hats hung like boot-laces over each ear and two of us were clutching china jugs, earned as prizes at one of the booth shows. When we tried to explain our predicament to him he obviously thought that we, and not those urchins, were the offenders in that midnight brawl. The crowd, however, scattered when they saw him near and more than half of them went home. A few dogged our steps along the Embankment, lurking in the shadows between lamp-posts and returning to the attack when there was no passer-by. One of them had now produced a gruesome weapon, in the form of a clammy grey dish-clout rescued from the gutter, every now and then it came lashing across our faces.

By this time the humiliation, insults and dirt heaped upon us had roused our fighting instincts to such a pitch that we could hardly keep from turning on our enemies. Yet only once did that happen, when the Artist, seized by a sudden rage, with a single blow sent a small boy rolling into the gutter.

At Vauxhall Bridge they all left us and scampered back to their own side of the river. A party of besotted drunkards who had spent nights in a ditch would have inspired as much respect as those four members of a Ladies' Hostel who, reeking of stables, stood at the street corner and watched that retreat of the urchins. A man passing by looked at us in amazement and said: 'What have you been doing?' We explained that we had been mistaken for Suffragettes and mobbed. 'You look like 'em,' he replied.

We stumbled in to the Hostel, thinking only of soap and hot water, expecting only sympathy and consolation but the raddled watch-keeper merely said: 'Why have you been blacking your faces?' Then she demanded fourpence from each one of us because we were late. The other two strolled in as we were paying our fees, they had clean clothes and clean faces and were much surprised at hearing of our adventures. The irony of it all was that we were none of us Suffragettes. That night we four each cleaned out our

own bath and for many years I never spoke of that expedition to anyone.

Yet despite the dirt and humiliation and fear I felt a curious exhilaration both during the adventure and afterwards. It was as if at last I had tasted that mysterious thing called 'Life', the thing that I had been always seeking. Later I was often led to realise that even the rough side of life is better than stale monotony. 'Then welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough . . . Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe' . . . 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun, Nor the furious winter's 'ages.' Those poets had experience and wisdom.

The rooted mountains keep their stillness when storms break on their peaks and avalanches thunder down their slopes; the trees toss boughs in delirious harmony with each sweeping breath of a gale; flowers turn to sunlight or drink the rain. Yet only after long years of living does one learn the lesson of how to take the rough with the smooth in full realisation that unchanging smoothness would be an ugly denial of nature. The Lambeth Walk episode was, for me, a first step in this lesson; it provoked my first conscious mood of elation after misfortune, which may bring with it most fully the sense of being alive, even if the misfortune should be accompanied by pain and loss. Death is the only trouble that never may be disarmed by this mental attitude.

Imperceptibly the family came to recognize my wish to work in the slums as something more than a momentary whim and their opposition crumbled. The day came when I found myself settled in Southwark at the Women's University Settlement, commonly called W.U.S., with seventeen other residents, including three students who, like myself, were to take a year's course of training in Social Work. This course would combine theory and practice, ranging from lectures and study at the London School of Economics to work in various branches of activity, carried on at W.U.S. Nearly all the other residents had been to a university. One or two of them had long since fallen into a rut and were now overworking themselves to such an extent that they had no time for broadening their outlook but all of them were, I felt, immensely my superiors, better

educated and, for the most part, more versed in the art of living. For the first time I began to practice that art deliberately, trying to express in each hour of each day Pauline's 'principle of restlessness, which would be all, hear, see, know, taste, feel all'.

Our work was extremely varied. We four attended lectures at the London School of Economics and sat under Professor Urwick who could invest the driest subject with human interest; we worked in the Southwark C.O.S. office, dealing with case-papers and going out to pay visits of enquiry; we helped to run mixed clubs in the evenings for boys and girls; we collected rents from house to house in streets of inexpressible dreariness and poverty; we visited homes and schools on Care Committee work and noticed how the heads of that department were always on the verge of breaking down from overwork; we went weekly to certain schools on behalf of the C.C.H.F. in order to collect the children's contributory pennies and, when the great day came and Liverpool Street station had become a mass of milling, excited juveniles, we helped to shepherd them into their appointed trains. Then we would meet them two weeks later when they returned from their holiday, trailing sacks and hugging paper bags that were bursting with country produce. Also we took shifts at giving out books on week-day evenings at the Working Men's College Lending Library and sometimes wrote a short review of a book for the College Magazine. Once a fortnight we went to Miss Montagu's club for Jewish girls in Soho and tried to teach English to Russian and Polish Jewesses but always became, after a while, utterly bewildered in that hive of activity where those Jewish girls exuded an exuberant vitality that one could almost touch and taste in the air.

As students we were sent also to visit other Settlements and scenes of Social Work outside Southwark.

Underlying this phantasmagoria of Organizations and crowds and activities two figures stand out in memory because they evoked deep feeling, and in most of our work we gave ourselves no time for deep feeling, we were so very busy gathering facile impressions. These two were Mr Scott and Mrs Dunwoody, with both of whom I came into a very close relationship.

Mr Scott was a young man, a fine upstanding fellow who worked at a hotel in the Strand as a kitchen porter for a most miserable wage. He wanted to emigrate and he applied to the C.O.S. For weeks and months we battled together, he and I in close alliance, as we threaded the maze of C.O.S. enquiries and Government red tape; it all seemed to us like a forest of briars and fallen trees and entangled creepers that checked our progress at every step. Often he was tempted to give up hope but we persevered until all the enquiries had been answered and all the requirements fulfilled and Mr Scott went off to Canada. So far as I know he made good there, or, to use the favourite phrase of Victorian novelists, he 'lived happy ever after'. He wrote to me at intervals for several years and then I lost touch with him. What I shall always remember is his first letter from Canada, in which he said that thanks were not possible but that he would always keep in his heart a feeling for me that was something like a 'Thank-you'.

Yet I had really done nothing except perhaps help him to keep alive his spirit of hopefulness. It may be that the sharing of hope is a great gift.

Mrs Dunwoody, a very old woman, lived with her daughter Mrs Murphy who washed clothes. Their home was one dark room that always smelt of cats and wet garments. Smells in some of those slums were the worst thing I had to encounter and I have a most vivid memory of once coming out from a room in Jubilee Buildings that was occupied by two women, a baby, several small children and three cats and trying to be violently sick on the stairs. In Mrs Dunwoody's home, however, I always met such a warmth of welcome that I could forget the smells and stuffiness. For the old woman was country-born and country-bred and she loved to talk of lanes and trees and flowers; she had green fingers and on her sooty window-sill there was a box with a sprig of rosemary that was just alive and two or three other cuttings and a very small green chestnut tree. We would talk endlessly about the country and sometimes I would take her a new sprig for her box and always we would inspect her growing treasures with the solemn interest of those who pace about some stately garden and plan for future planting.

Many's the cup of tea I had in Mrs Dunwoody's home, sitting under wet garments that hung on a string, trying to keep my feet out of the cats' saucers, talking to her and the hospitable Mrs Murphy. I cannot remember the object of my first visit but I know that long after the official purpose had either failed or been fulfilled I used to drop in and see her whenever I found myself near her street. I felt like a moth fluttering round the candle of welcome that she kept ever burning for me.

Mr Scott and Mrs Dunwoody were outstanding figures but also, taking Southwark people as a whole, I found them friendly and warm-hearted, nor was this one person's lone experience for all the workers at W.U.S. felt the same about them.

Since my seventeen companions were all better educated and, for the most part, more well-read than myself, I had the daily stimulus of looking up to them. Among the elders two were so ugly that they were hardly human but we were always given to understand that their brains were highly esteemed wherever they worked on outside committees. One was immensely fat and the other had knife-edge lips and an incipient grey moustache. They were close friends. We kept our distance from them, though the moustachioed one would sometimes emit a dry witticism that convulsed us all but we never learned how to provoke these sallies, they would come suddenly, like windfalls. We all respected the Warden who was small, dark-eyed and intense but she had not the gift of geniality and none of us ever drew near her except when, later, in two fateful interviews, circumstances brought me in touch with her warm sympathy. Among the other residents were a few middle-aged women who had settled into their own specialized jobs and become rather faded and neutral in the process, but there were many younger ones who came and went and kept the place alive; among these I found several friendly people and one real friend.

Two men from the C.O.S. office were brave enough to enter this nest of women sometimes in order to share our hot lunch. One was a small, dedicated, saintly person, with pimples on his face, who was working himself to death and the other was an Adonis with golden hair who was beloved by all for his simple, friendly manner. What

because of him I do not know. In our crowd he always looked like a sunflower towering among cabbages.

Settlement life, however, was not all work, for we had our weekends free, also many of the evenings, and these, in their own different way became as full as our days. There were two hospitable homes where I could always find a welcome, for Amy lived with her father in Kensington and Nadia with her mother in Gray's Inn. Then there were all the delights of London; theatres, music-halls, picture galleries, second-hand book shops, ancient buildings, Kew Gardens, the Natural History Museum and the room with the sculptured Fates in the British Museum. Once a party of us went to hear Rabindranath Tagore read some of his poems at the Caxton Hall; he read in his own language and spoke no word of English throughout the evening but there was about him a most unusual poise and stillness. From the sound of his voice there emanated such a sense of peace that I felt as if it had been an intimate physical touch. Often too I went with Nadia to hear Poetry Readings at Harold Monro's Poetry Book Shop.

Sometimes one or two of us would dine in Soho before going to a play, paying one and sixpence for a three-course dinner, or two and six if we were in funds. Now and then I would have a West End evening out, dinner and a theatre with a little man whose friendship dated from the voyage to South Africa; we cemented the friendship for many years by giving each other books at Christmas. There were also West End evenings with two naval friends of my brother, one of whom remained a 'steady' for many years. The other was a vital person interested in all aspects of life. Once he took me to the Empire and another time he came to visit our mixed Club in Southwark and returned to W.U.S. at the end of the evening to drink cocoa with us all round the common-room fire. Even the Warden and the two ugly intellectuals thawed in the presence of his charm and ready interest.

There were also secret explorations in the underworld of London. I persuaded a Jewish fellow-student to come with me and sleep in a common-lodging-house in the Old Kent Road, where a bed cost sixpence and we each had a private cubicle with thin partitions.

It was a somewhat bleak experience but even more bleak and dreary was the common-lodging-house in Lisson Grove where I spent a night alone in a fourpenny bed. In fact it was a grim experience. We slept under grimy horse blankets, some eighteen of us in two rows, with a clothes-basket at the bottom of each bed. A dim light was burning all night. I woke about midnight to see a creature with a mahogany-brown face and an apparently hairless head settling into the bed next to mine; it looked like a man. There was no fresh air in that place and the night was very long. In the morning I observed that the brown-faced person was a woman with cropped hair and a deeply wrinkled face. We washed at a long row of taps and basins, had bread and dripping for breakfast and were then sent out for the day, wet or fine. There was no sitting-room in that unhomely place. On the far side of the breakfast table I saw a woman who had been an applicant to the C.O.S. in my Marylebone days and I fled from the place in terror of being recognized. I had no wish to repeat that experience, yet I gained something from it that I have never lost, an appreciation of my own lot perhaps and a wider sympathy for homeless people.

There were times when I felt a desperate need to be alone and then at the week-end I would go by train to Chertsey or Chislehurst Wood and spend a whole day walking or lying under stately beeches, to get the dust of Southwark out of my eyes and throat, and to satisfy my longing for green things. Or I would walk at night along the Thames Embankment, round its great semi-circle from Westminster to Blackfriars Bridge, and watch the reflected lights quivering in the water and lean on the parapet until I was dizzy with the beauty of the scene and could understand what St Paul felt like when he was 'out of the body'.

Then, if it were a Saturday night, I would sometimes return by the New Cut, to enjoy the babel and jostling and colour of the market; strolling past the shop where 'really reliable eels' were advertised above a dish full of fishy fragments; looking with admiration at the pearl buttons on the costermongers' clothes; exhilarated by the shouting and the bright flare lights and the continuous

: London Scenes :

moving of figures to and fro, to and fro, like waves of the sea or tree boughs tossing in a gale.

Perpetual movement for mind and body all through the week and sometimes on a Sunday the peace of silence beneath those beeches, every day new faces and new experience, new ideas and ever-widening sympathies; this was the life at W.U.S., this was surely life as it should be lived.

CHAPTER 9

: UPHEAVALS :

That satisfying existence was doomed to encounter a sudden check from a quite unexpected direction.

In childhood and in those 'do-nothing' years that followed childhood I would often see myself as a small ship becalmed in a land-locked harbour, my home-life being that harbour and outside was the great, enchanted ocean whereon grown-ups sailed to and fro in freedom. My day-dreams were haunted by brightly coloured vessels in that world which had no boundaries; some vessels were large and some were small, some were bulky and powerful, others light-winged and swift as birds, but all would spend their days in glorious, cheerful movement, cognizant of any breeze, scudding before a gale or battling with a storm or 'rocked in the cradle of the deep' but never, never still with sails flapping, never as 'idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean'. They would be going about their business with never any containing horizon to say 'no further' and they would travel to spice-scented islands where there would be no dead-end of fulfilment, for after one voyage there would always be another.

These things were but an allegory in my childish mind, indicative of my longing for search and discovery, for contrast of endeavour and success, for change, movement, experience and strength. Life at W.U.S. had given me many of these things. Then the axe fell.

Rumours came from home that my elder sister was getting engaged to be married. I knew too well what were my parents' feelings about the necessity of a home-daughter. Naomi would be considered too young to fill the gap and they would expect me to return. I awaited definite news with horrible alternations of hope and fear. The man in question had been a fellow passenger on our voyage out to Queensland some years previously. My sister used to walk round and round the deck with him so often that my mother said :

'What *do* you find to talk about with that strange little man?' He was indeed no Adonis but he was a brilliant geologist and, as we learned later, a man of absolute integrity. 'We talk about gold, Mother,' was the reply of my sapient sister, 'and the chances of finding it at Toorilla.' My mother had always hoped that Toorilla, our cattle-station, would become a second Mt Morgan.

Nothing more happened for several years during which he was travelling in distant lands and was occupied in making provision for his parents in New Zealand. Now he had reappeared, ostensibly to inspect Cornish mines, in reality to court my sister. He was of Scottish origin but had been born and reared in New Zealand and was therefore what my mother termed, in tones of infinite contempt, a 'colonial'. What was his background? Where were his credentials? There was no one who could answer these questions or tell her anything about either of his grandfathers, so she claimed the help of a business acquaintance in the city and had searching enquiries made.

Meanwhile she wrote to me in a state of maternal flutter and, being always secretive in her habits, arranged to send a code telegram if these city enquiries were well and truly answered and the engagement were sanctioned. The telegram would be: 'Cold herrings to-day'. How I dreaded those herrings. They duly arrived.

The wedding preparations were hastened for 'Malcolm' had urgent work ahead of him in Africa and Australia. I went home with a heavy heart to face the wedding and its implications for my career. The chief thing that I remember about that unsettled time was my mother's persistent refusal to call her son-in-law by his Christian name. In the end her best friend took a firm line with her. This feline, ambitious, clear-headed woman had planned worldly marriages for all her own daughters and had failed in every attempt, but she was a realist. She appeared wearing, as usual, very expensive clothes and a picture hat. She was a woman in whose presence we always felt like dowdy frumps but she had a strange magnetic influence over my mother.

'Now Charlotte,' she said, after she had heard my mother referring in icy tones to 'this gentleman' or 'Mr M.' 'you've got to

face it. Very soon he will be one of your family. I shall place this log of wood up-ended against the fender to remind you that you must practice on it. You must look at it and keep on saying "Malcolm, Malcolm" until you are used to the name and then it will come out naturally.' No one ever saw her performing rehearsals with that log but we noticed within a few days that she was saying 'Malcolm' if not with ease at any rate without obvious reluctance.

As for my part in the wedding preparations, I was regarded as a black sheep because I had avowed my intention of carrying on with work at W.U.S., having found in that strenuous life not only happiness but also freedom for body, soul and spirit. My father kept aloof from the question but there were several scenes with my mother, or rather several discussions, for in these talks there was never a tear shed nor any sign of feeling shown. If my mother had given any sign of affection, my defences would have crumbled at once. These talks seemed to me terrible things to happen between members of a family, for they were attempts to solve by argument a problem that should have been solved by love. I knew that by instinct and felt it bitterly, while my mother reiterated: 'Surely you don't wish to leave your home now that your sister is getting married. Surely your sense of duty will bring you home now.' This she said as if I had gone astray in the last months and would naturally return to the fold at the summons of this momentous marriage.

There was a terrible hardness and flatness about those talks, they did not seem to touch the heart of the matter or to have any connection with reality. I could only blink back the tears as I saw my career and happiness in ruins, my freedom lost, and it was not possible to mention either. I could only mutter: 'Naomi is nineteen now and is growing out of her asthma'.

When I had written from W.U.S. to my elder sister and told her that I planned to continue my chosen career she had replied that 'to choose one's own way of life is just what a Christian cannot do'. This was the only time she ever mentioned Christianity. Even as she wrote that letter she was choosing marriage. Finally, after going through a hell of indecision and misery, I compromised and decided

to stay at home for one term, studying as best I could, and then return to the Settlement to finish the Students' Year and to sit for the exam, leaving Naomi to take the place of home-daughter. Was I right or wrong? Who can tell? I was only one of many thousand victims in our day when it was considered almost criminal for a girl to follow any career except marriage. The final decision, however, was taken out of my hands by fate, some fifteen months later.

The brightest part of that wedding for us all was the presence of my brother Harry. He had a strange pragmatic wisdom of his own that would cut through problems with the sharpness of a knife, even while he was weighing thoughts and feelings in equal balance. He saw both sides of our family dissension and that was infinitely comforting to me. In spite of his wisdom he seemed to race through his own short life with a 'devil-may-care' attitude. 'Gallio cared for none of these things,' he would always say cheerfully when he ran into debt or misfortune. He was immensely strong and could shout in a stentorian voice; one of his early naval reports ended with : 'He gives his orders well'. I can see him now at a County Ball, towering above some fluffy young partner and dancing like a pair of tongs as he steered her through the mazes of a polka, handling her as if she were a tiller and booming out directions 'Hard-a-port' or 'Hard-a-starboard'. He would give the same directions to his horse in the hunting field as he pulled on one rein or another and charged at the highest bank full tilt. He could twist my mother round his little finger.

My sister's marriage was a happy one. She travelled far and wide with her husband; they had five children born in various parts of the world and finally seven grandsons. She lived with some of the offspring in Africa to a ripe and active old age, keeping up to the end a tireless interest in the rearing of turkeys and in the exact weight of each fish caught by her grandsons in the Zambezi river. When her physical energy began to fail she would sit in the verandah with Zeiss glasses, supervising the work of her African boys in the garden.

During my three months at home after the wedding, my father, who had taken no part in the discussions and was always a man of

peace and few words, hardly spoke to me. I had much time for thought in the intervals of studying Economics and realised that I had now struck some roots into the ground of what we call 'Life' and had even gained, at last, a few convictions.

Placidity, I now knew, was not a virtue but a vice. The middle of the road was for poltroons; gutters and side-tracks were full of interest and sometimes contained treasures. Complacent people were prisoners inside their own selves, unaware that there must be two sides to every question; such people can never lose their own identity by looking at leaping flames or riding at full gallop or turning a corner to explore unknown country. I hated common-sense and the repetition of daily experience, especially putting on stockings and fastening hooks. (Zip fasteners had not been invented and no self-respecting woman in those days wore socks instead of stockings.) Nature, our great exemplar, never was confined by boundaries or routine and I now understood that those two things were just signs of bondage marked out by parents and teachers, they were useless and unreasonable. We had been given life in order to overleap such obstacles. I longed to see floods and avalanches, to experience hurricanes and earthquakes and passionate love and even unrequited love for I knew that all experience must enrich the mind. Indeed my thoughts travelled far in those quiet months, I was ready to hitch my waggon to any star but the trouble was that all the stars seemed equally attractive and equally remote. How could I discover which really was the best?

Having returned to W.U.S. for the third Students' term and passed the London School of Economics examination with distinction, I had to face the question of money. My own small income would pay for my board at the Settlement and no more. In a heart-to-heart talk with the reserved Warden I laid all my cards on the table. Only once again did I ever come near to that great-hearted woman or obtain a glimpse of the warm sympathy that she kept always under control. Then and there she invented a small paid job for me, relying on her Committee to produce the money. I was to spend half my time on Children's Country Holiday Fund and half on Care Committee work, visiting the schools to collect con-

tributary pence for the first, and for the second taking endless notes about doctors, dentists, boots and shoes, convalescent homes and then following up those notes by visits to the homes.

Every time that I set out with a despatch-case full of papers to pay visits in those Southwark slums, my heart would swell with pride at being a paid worker. At last I was justifying my existence and fulfilling some deep need; there was no question of religious enthusiasm or self-denial in my attitude to the work that often led me to witness tragic or sordid scenes which, as war beginning to realize, were just the reverse side of the pattern, life's own ubiquitous combination of the rough and the smooth. In daily life at W.U.S. I found expression for some primal need, expression denied to most girls of my class and generation who were expected to live at home in aimless fashion. They lived in an atmosphere where hobbies and interests were allowed only if they were not pursued with too much enthusiasm, where the satisfaction of creative instincts were not encouraged because artists, actors and writers were apt to be peculiar people and peculiarity was a vice; as for a vocation, it was 'not the thing'. The word marriage was not often used but we knew that it would be the only vocation to receive parental approval.

That rich life at the Settlement was resumed with occasional excursions across the river and, now and then, a day out in the country among trees. The noise and movement and variety of London crowds was a perpetual excitement, inducing strange happiness. Whitechapel and the New Cut were still my favourite haunts in moods of elation and for meditative hours there was always, after darkness fell, the chance of that walk along the Thames Embankment in the bewitching beauty of lights all quivering in the water. Whether thoughtful or elated I was always alive, intensely alive in every day of every week.

This lasted for some six months.

My young sister, suffering less and less from asthma, was beginning to enjoy life as never before. She went to Brittany on a sketching tour with a family whom she had met on one of her cures in Switzerland and while returning with them to their Surrey

home she caught cold, developed pneumonia, asthma and heart trouble; in spite of a specialist and oxygen she died in their house.

I do not care to dwell on all this. The horror of that first encounter with death has never faded. My mother and father who had arrived in time to see her die, went home at once. I and my brother Harry who had been summoned from his ship, too late, remained with the kind friends until we could travel home with the coffin. Meanwhile I went up to London for a half-hour's interview with the Warden.

For the second time I saw the human side of her. 'I must go home now,' I said. 'For good.' Her uncontradicting silence was full of warmth. 'About the Care Committee work,' I said, 'I can do nothing but I have a friend who will certainly take on the C.C.H.F. work for the rest of the season.' I had not had time to consult Amy, and I knew that she was heavily involved in the social round with her father, but I counted on her and she did not fail me. Then I went home. For good. What a strange expression that is, I thought.

Three months later came the First World War. It caught us in Germany. We had gone to Munich for a Wagner Festival, four of us, my brother Michael who was home on leave from Queensland, B.B. our beloved friend who was his good genius and mine for thirty years until she died when she was over eighty, and Nadia. We travelled via Ostend, taking return tickets and not much cash, having arranged to pay our hotel bill by cheque. We heard Parsifal but next day the orchestra's musicians were mobilized. The hotel demanded cash payment, panic reigned at the railway stations and we decided to leave half our baggage with Thomas Cook and fight our way into a train with what suitcases we could carry. Seven years later Thomas Cook returned that baggage, complete with creased clothes and soiled underwear; it was by that time a strange reminder of the past.

We made for Switzerland. England and Germany were not yet at war but the sands were running out and Michael was of military age. We stopped at Zurich and went straight to the Consul's office where we heard the news that we were at war. I remember stumbling down the steps of the Consulate feeling numb all over

and yet at the same time flinching as from a spear thrust and saying to myself : 'It can't be true. It can't be true.' When I looked about me the figures in the street were all blurred. We went on to Bern and found a cheap hotel; our funds were very low. It is strange how few and trivial are the things that I recall about our stay in Switzerland and our nightmare journey home, little things like islets dotted about in a troubled sea.

Each hour was long as a day. There was hardly any news about England in the papers. We had to eke out our money carefully, we had not enough to buy tickets home. B.B. telegraphed to her banker brother and we waited. For lunch we bought plates of 'schnitzel' at a cabman's café, two of us sharing one plate. Nadia and I wandered out into the country and picked cherries from the fields and brought home a bag full of them. One day I found myself in a book-shop and could not resist spending eight shillings on four perfect volumes of Heinrich Heine's complete works, they were a bargain. When I returned with my treasures Michael was greatly annoyed at the waste of money and the addition to our luggage. Nadia, of course, was in sympathy with my extravagance, although she could not read German. B.B. took no part in the arguments that raged between us three about the weight and cost of those four volumes which I treasure to this day.

We all went to Battenberg for a night to escape from the town. B.B. and I climbed a mountain there and sat on a peak while a thunderstorm burst below us; we looked down on a world without solid form; we were above the black clouds that were lit now and then by forked lightning. In a lone forest up there I took off my clothes and rolled in wet moss, encouraged by B.B. who, twenty-five years earlier, had discovered the wonderful sensations induced by a moss bath. This was only one of the many things that she taught me. I owe many of life's best moments to her.

At last her brother managed to get twenty pounds through to us by telegram. Our third-class railway journey through France was like a bad dream. Troops overcrowded every train and station and progress was very slow; at intervals the engine would pull up with a fearful jerk, nearly dislocating our necks as we were leaning back

in the half sleep of exhaustion. Our luggage would then fall on to us from the racks and there was no room to stack it between our knees. It was the third week in August and we had heard no reliable news about England since that fateful news at the Consulate in Zurich. We had no idea where Harry would be, we had left him in a stationary ship in Devonport. At Bern the French and German newspapers had been full of contradictions. We stopped at Amiens and a casual Frenchman told us that the whole of the British fleet had been sunk and we believed him. We were in the mood to believe any tale of disaster.

At last we arrived at Victoria and went straight to the Grosvenor Hotel. In the lounge we met my political cousin Charles, strangely dressed in naval uniform, en route for Antwerp. 'Where is Harry?' we said. 'In H.M.S. Monmouth,' was the answer, 'off to the Pacific'. The first reaction of Michael and myself was the thought of how Harry would hate being out of it all and how he would be thirsting for 'a scrap'. So little had we yet learned of the meaning of war.

Ten weeks later Michael and I were sitting alone at breakfast, the parents being away for a couple of days. He had not yet decided to join the Dorset Yeomanry, the need for every man to pull his weight was only slowly dawning on us all. The post was brought in. We opened the *Western Morning News* to see a large headline :

'H.M.S. Monmouth sunk at Coronel with all hands.'

The parents returned at once and for a whole week we were tortured by contradictory news and rumours. The newspapers had nothing but surmise and comment and there were telegrams bringing rumoured tales of survivors. One telegram from a mere acquaintance in Lincolnshire, assured us that the Captain's wife had received news from him and the Monmouth was beached and the Captain alive on the coast of Chile.

At the end of those seven long days the Admiralty telegraphed, announcing it must now be presumed that all hands were lost. It was a very strange thing, but it is true that for one split second that telegram brought us a feeling which was almost a feeling of relief. After those interminable days we were free, at last, from the

agony of uncertainty, from the bitter strife between our hopes and fears. I remember that evening taking up my mother's flat silver candlestick and lighting it for her as usual as she was going to bed and her presenting a cold cheek for the good-night kiss and going upstairs in silence. While we were sympathizing with Harry over his Pacific exile my father had been watching the news and calculating the relative size of the Monmouth and Good Hope and their powerful pursuers the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. He had realised that there was very little hope but he had kept that knowledge to himself.

The day after that telegram arrived I was sent off, riding my father's hunter, with a message to some neighbours five miles away. Even now, when I travel on that road I can recall the strange thoughts and feelings that filled my mind during the ride. What should I say to the neighbours after the message was delivered? I was friendly with one of the daughters and would surely have to tell her what had happened but how could I say : 'My brother is killed?' just casually, or 'My brother is dead?' They were impossible words to say, it was an impossible thought to realise in that world of green grass fields and November berries and golden leaves on the trees. It was an impossible thing to believe. Harry was always so boisterously, so gloriously alive, it could not be that he would never come home again, that he had ended his life in one moment of agony. Had he been drowned or shot or burned alive? We never knew and we never shall know. The thought of a violent death in one's own family was something that the mind could not absorb. How does anyone ever get used to death, even to a calm death in a bed, I wondered, as I rode on slowly in the November sunshine. The horror of it, in contrast to the life that we ourselves still possessed was a thing that one could not register.

I do not remember what I did say after delivering that message, I think I muttered gruffly 'We've had very bad news' and I think the family answered 'Yes, we know, we know' and were tactful enough to say no more. All through those years there was so much to be borne and so little to be said.

In that four years of chaos, destined to change not only the face

of our world but also the thoughts, habits and feelings of mankind, my own small war effort was about as important as the part played, in one household, by a fly on the ceiling. Moreover my movements were changeable as those of any fly, for as soon as I was settled in a job there would come the summons: 'Wanted at home'. I was let out on a string, as it were, for a few months at a time and then jerked back again by the family demands.

The first move, naturally, was to attend a course of Red Cross lectures, in case every pair of hands among the women should be needed for hospital work. Then I put in odd hours work at the laundry of an army convalescent home, ironing, and usually scorching, many shirts and collars. After what seemed like years, but in reality it was only a matter of months, I went across to France with a friend on a real job. This was canteen work in Rouen where, crowded into two small upstairs rooms, we served out 'Two-eggs-twice' or 'Tea-and-Cake' or 'Pennorth-o'-coffin-nails' (Woodbine cigarettes) to a never-ending line of men. They came tramping up the stairs, deafening all other sounds with their heavy boots and ate their snacks in the little room beyond the counter. We were allowed our own food from the café, so if there ever was a pause, we ate cornucopias filled with a mawkish yellow custard. One of our companions had a very irritating voice and used to say to each man, with a high-pitched, senseless lilting emphasis on the word 'lightly', 'Do you like your eggs *lightly* boiled?' My friend and I, weary and befuddled with boiling eggs and calculating change, always felt that the tone of that one word would be the last straw for us some day. Our nerves were strung up to a high pitch, I was always thinking of my dead brother and she was thinking of her only brother who had not yet been killed.

Three other things about Rouen I remember vividly. There were lone walks from the hill where I lodged, down to the café and each morning I would pass St Oden and go in for a few minutes to sit in the nave and gaze at those Gothic lines which were so beautiful, it seemed as if the stone were about to break out into song. Once or twice we both went to the top of the Cathedral and looked down on the many-coloured market-place and saw men and women very

far below, gay as flowers. Twice my friend took me out to lunch with a friend of hers, an elderly Colonel; the first day he gave us an epicurean feast at the hotel where he was quartered and on the second occasion he took us down the river in a steam-boat; the luncheon basket was filled with every luxury. He had an old-world courtesy and treated us both as if we were princesses.

After two months of this work in Rouen I was recalled home. Repercussions from the European battlefields had reached as far as Cornwall and the influx of Belgian refugees had begun. The first small war-job that awaited me was to go and stay with a neighbouring cousin for a few days while she had four convalescent Belgian officers as guests. Her husband was away with his regiment, her three sons were in the fighting line. She knew only seven words of French and to these she gave such an English accent that no one could possibly understand them, but she carried out her self-imposed task gallantly. Our own village meanwhile had formed a committee and planned to furnish a cottage in a lonely valley by the deserted mines and support a family of Belgians there. The auctioneer's wife, the schoolmaster's wife, a farmer's daughter and I whitewashed that cottage from floor to ceiling and became lifelong friends in the process. There was much laughter because I emerged from every spell of work as white as Father Christmas, being quite unable to learn the art of whitewashing tidily. There was little laughter after the Belgian family arrived. They complained of the rats, the loneliness, the food. The committee had to face one crisis after another. Finally they left us.

My next contact with the Belgians was in Holland where the family left me for six months without a summons. I was working under the Society of Friends in a camp where Belgians were interned. That experience with the Quakers would make a whole story to itself and, as I see it now in retrospect, it seems to me the only worth-while work that I did in those four years. The family, however, would not hear of my signing on for another six months but insisted on my coming home to find some short-term war-work.

Meanwhile the hospitals were becoming over-filled and every V.A.D. was needed. I had little hope of ever being anything but

an inadequate nurse, having no aptitude for the work and a violent dislike for the smell of a hospital. I was posted to a small convalescent home at Beckenham where three of us were idle day after day, waiting for patients that never came; then I was sent to the shell-shock ward of Maudslay hospital, where epileptics, abnormal persons, nervous cases and genuine shell-shock patients were crowded together. Sometimes I would be able to help one of those men with lost courage and wandering minds, haunted by the ghost of fear, help them merely by listening and encouraging them to express in everyday words something of the secret horrors that obsessed them. Then, after several months of this work, it was a case of Home Again for me and because Maudslay would not sign me on for less than six months I had to be content with a three months posting to a Red Cross hospital at Stratford-on-Avon. There, for the first time, I had to put my fears behind me in order to face blood and wounds and that experience also would need a whole story to itself.

Armistice Day came while I was at Stratford and then I went home for good, coughing furiously, with a mustard gas infection caught from the last convoy.

Of course this chronicle of my activities in those four years is very small beer, ridiculously small when compared with the magnitude of events taking place at the time. Yet a single raindrop on a bough, a single puddle at one's feet are also small things but they can be indicative of violent storms and they can reflect all the colours of the rainbow. It happens so often that, while strange and important things escape through the sieve of one's memory, much of the dross remains in the form of irrelevant nothings. Even now I can hear the lifted voice of the Canteen bore : 'Do you like your eggs *lightly* boiled?' I can see the hedgerows on either side of that road where I decided that I could not speak the words : 'My brother is dead'. I can smell the burnt cocoa that I made when on night duty in Stratford-on-Avon hospital. But I cannot picture in my mind the exact look of my brother's face, nor recall the sound of his voice in memory.

CHAPTER 10

: ON READING BOOKS :

All this time, during those years of repression under the governess, the terms of expansion at school, the slow process of growing up at home, the London scenes of interrupted work and the upheavals of a world war, two important things persisted in my life like golden threads running through a variegated pattern of moods, experience and discoveries; the love of reading which became a rooted habit and a hope which I followed as my own particular star, a hope sometimes wavering into despair, sometimes rising to conviction that I would one day write something worth while. Everything that I read was a stepping stone towards being able to write, each book would act as warning or example.

Two small events had been supremely important in my self-appointed career, the gift of a book and the receipt of a letter.

Soon after I left school my godmother sent me a copy of Saintsbury's *A History of English Literature*. At once I set to work to read nearly all the major and a number of the minor English classics. Saintsbury's style always seemed to me pedestrian but at any rate if he did not rise to eloquence he seldom sank to verbosity and he was, on the whole, a competent guide to the good, the better and the best. Those were the days of book bargains and I haunted the Charing Cross Road every time I was in London, slowly but surely building up my library.

Having bought a copy of Saintsbury's history of French Literature, I plunged into reading French prose and poetry. I re-read Voltaire with admiration for his pungent style and his passionate love of truth; ploughed through Corneille, Racine, Bossuet and even some of that dreary Boileau; read François Villon with sad affection, Rousseau and Rabelais with curiosity, Victor Hugo with critical amazement, Molière with enjoyment and Pascal with difficulty. La Fontaine always induced yawns and depression. he had

been spoilt for me when I had to recite to the governess 'Maître Corbeau sur un arbre perché'. Dumas I read without enthusiasm, Baudelaire with fascinated attention, Sainte-Beuve as an informative companion for the middle of the road, Montaigne again and again with satisfaction, Flaubert with veneration, Renan with deep interest.

A great number of 19th and 20th century books were read once and then never again, but those two introspective pessimists, Sénancour and Amiel, became prime favourites. At that time I had not learned from gardeners that pessimism is a weak and foolish creed and had not realised that after storm comes peace, after rain the sunshine, after drought the rain, and that nature always does and always will redress her balance. We do not find many pessimists among animals and flowers.

There was one minor French writer, Maurice de Guérin, whose prose poem *Le Centaure* filled me with that strange union of ecstasy and contentment induced sometimes by Shakespeare when his prose will take wings and express something far beyond the sum of his assembled words. Such writing is like a voice whispering with insistence in the reader's ear, awakening that memory of which Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote :

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell.
I know the grass beyond the door.
The sweet, keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights beyond the shore.

In due course, by the help of Hugo's self-taught system and the Loeb editions of the classics I strayed rather aimlessly in the fields of Italian, Spanish and Greek literature and also made efforts to retain a little German. In other languages I had to rely on translations but among all those writers I made several personal friends : Leopardi, Don Quixote, Euripides, Heinrich Heine, Turgenev, Selma Lagerlof and Ibsen.

Now, after all these years of multifarious and undirected reading, what have I gained? Little precise knowledge but many things more important than mere facts or information. I have gained

: On Reading Books :

among books an abiding sense of spaciousness and variety in the minds of men. It is as if every now and then I had been allowed to mount a very high tower and had been given a view, not only over our physical world of mountains, valleys, plains and water, but also into the secret places of men's minds where they keep their hopes and fears and loves, their agonies and inhibitions far from the level, trodden ways of everyday events. Such experience, recurring at intervals, has remained in memory as the permanent reward of wide reading but of course there are many other blessings that can be conferred by books. There is information and amusement and enlightenment; there is solace in hours of distress or tedium; there is also inspiration for self-conquest and endeavour, there is companionship of the many and enduring friendship of the few.

Yet the watch-tower experience remains supremely important, for in a world where each one of us is doomed to grope and fumble alone, that vision from high places can bring us some little measure of understanding, some insight into other human minds.

The other important small event happened some years later.

I was staying with Nadia and her mother at their home in Penn. There was a friend of the mother living in a cottage on the other side of the village green; this woman, J.T.K.T., was a warm-hearted person who read widely, painted a little, wrote a little, continued all through her long life to adopt one lame dog and one forlorn cause after another and never lost her belief in human nature nor her hopefulness. She came to tea several times and we all talked of books and writers and plays and of other such things that really matter, and there was never a word of the personal gossip so prevalent among us and the neighbours in our rooted homes. On my last evening, as we all walked back to the cottage beyond the green, I was, as I well remember, treading on air, for I found myself walking beside her and she was talking to me as if I were highly intelligent and this was a novel, exciting experience.

After my return home, when mental loneliness had once again enclosed me, I wrote to her, greatly daring and enclosed some of my written fragments and asked for criticism. They were short prose impressions of people, places and things, of a sunset, a face seen

in a crowd, a solitary walk. They were all lacking in sharp outlines, like the snapshots that we used to take in those days with our inadequate Brownie cameras; moreover every noun was propped up and weakened by an attendant adjective, sometimes by two adjectives, and the punctuation was peculiar and there were far too many qualifying statements, too many brackets and inverted commas and such-like devices for concealing one's inability to concentrate and condense. In fact they had no austerity in thought or style.

This is the answer that I received from my new friend.

I have read your fragments with great interest and am now returning them. It is most difficult on these short things to judge as to what would be your best line. You have not yet got a sufficiently firm hold of the medium for the thought to come out clear and strong on paper and I think you still find some merely mechanical difficulty about words and phrases. I do not regard that as at all important, because the grammatical difficulties are so easily overcome. But you must somehow manage to get such a mastery of the medium of language that the words come easily and flow smoothly, so that the natural thing always for you when you have a thought will be to try and clothe it in beautiful or fitting words.

Now the best way to train your thought to find language is to read a great deal of writers who have *style*. Be very stern with yourself and read no medium writers *at all* until you can do so merely as a joke.

Marie Corelli and the author of *Diana Tempest* are simply poison for the serious student of literature because they have a cheap superficial air of having deep matter to expound and every young and serious student is subject to the same snare. He is so eager for light, so anxious to discover the thought that may help him, that he may easily be taken in by these charlatans of literature, and may have the fineness of his taste destroyed.

For thought read Emerson and Browning, I think you will not tire of either of these and you will not easily exhaust all that you can learn from them.

Read Meredith. If you find him very difficult do not be discouraged. I read the whole of the novels about once in every two years and I never read them without finding

something new. The poems are so much more difficult that I do not advise them.

Read all of Robert Louis Stevenson for style, essays, poems, child's verses, stories. The length and form of his sentences, the choice of words, is very fine.

Ruskin is the most poetical prose writer we have. His style is very beautiful and the greatness of his thought makes him unafraid of the medium.

William Morris in *News from Nowhere* and *Essays on Art* you will find very good for style.

When you have steeped yourself in some of these masterpieces for a time try and tackle something of greater length than you have yet done. Write an essay on some favourite author perhaps, taking Stevenson in his *Men and Books* as a model. And remember what Aristotle says about a work of art having a beginning and middle and an end. 'The beginning must be related to what is to follow. The middle must be related to what has gone before and what comes after and the end must be related to what has gone before.' It sounds almost childishly simple, yet it is the rule by which we can judge of any work, from a Greek tragedy to a modern essay. Make your plan before you begin to write your opening sentence.

I hope you may find something useful in some of these jottings. Let me hear from you again if I can be of any use at any time.

I think your writing shows a good power of observation both of nature and of man and also critical faculty.

I had been walking on air over that village green but now I was almost wafted to heaven in my Cornish home and for many days I lived in a new world of ambition, hopes and dreams. On the tidal wave of J.T.K.T.'s encouragement I felt sure that I only had to take her advice and the rest would surely follow. It never occurred to me that many of the best books are the outcome of deep workings in exceptional human minds. I had not realised that 'le style c'est l'homme' and that style is not just an acquired polish and that one must live and think and feel deeply before one can become a great writer.

Through all the ensuing years I have kept J.T.'s letter and have tried to follow the path that she marked out for me, acting on her

advice in every detail except that I could only absorb Ruskin in small doses at a time. Turning away from the snares of wordy eloquence and mere cleverness, I set out to study the works of great writers. One book led to another and my range widened without corresponding development in depth of thought. Sometimes, on reading lyrical poetry, especially the shorter poems of Shelley, or prose passages from certain nature writers, I would experience moments of elation that took me out of this world. Again and again, while reading Thoreau and Walt Whitman, I would feel that dazzling light had been shed on the meaning of life, that my feet being now set firmly on that road to the freedom which I was always seeking, I could move onward through the years without hesitation. Ignorance was, no doubt, the cause of all our troubles and failures; it would be so easy to become great and good now that the road ahead was lit up.

So I read on and on and every time that I opened a new book I felt sure that it was going to give me something important and that I must hurry to receive the gift.

I read widely among poets, belles lettres and biographies of thinking men. History I did not read at all; in those days we had no Trevelyan, C. V. Wedgwood and A. L. Rowse to illuminate the darkness of history and ever since the departure of the governess it had been dismissed to a resentful corner of my memory, for I believed it to be mainly a matter of dates attached to battles and treaties and Kings' reigns, with the names of Queens thrown in as further penalty. Travel books I read voraciously, and I dreamed of visiting the wild places of the earth, despite the fact that my allowance was forty pounds a year and that my family never would encourage nor countenance lone travel for a woman. By means of these books, however, I could move freely and alone outside the orbit of my somewhat insular life.

Certain books, read and 're-read, became a 'part of myself. The erudite would describe such books as 'formative influences'. To me they were familiar friends. Foremost among them were Matthew Arnold, Walt Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, Montaigne, Heine, Robert Browning and Pater. Only the other day



Mrs. Pocklington-Coltman godmother to the author



The author's aunt Mrs. Coltman-Rogers

I came across a quotation from Pater in an Anthology. It must be twenty years since I read those words but at once my mind leaped forward to the whole meaning of the passage. When anyone quotes a Psalm many of us can automatically recite the next verse or two but in this case it was not the actual words that I remembered as if a sudden spring had been released. The thing had gone far deeper than verbal memory. The philosophy had long ago become my own and now my secret thoughts gave back its echoes. For years I had been trying to practice it, forgetful of the precise words but never forgetful of Pater's idea which had become part of my creed. The idea was that we should give the first place in our daily life to the ideal or poetical traits and elements of distinction and live in these so exclusively that 'the mere drift and debris, the unadorned remainder of life becomes as though it were not'.

Strange echoes, as I read them now, from Pater's sheltered life of scholastic leisure.

Owing, no doubt, to the influence of Sénancour, Emerson, Amiel, Kant, Renan and others, certain unanswerable questions had begun to trouble me in very young days. What are we and why are we set on this earth, imprisoned in our bodies? What kind of hell or heaven are we bound for? Does it really matter how we spend our lives, what we see, think and do every day? I skimmed about among the philosophers seeking for an answer until my mind was a hotch-potch of ideas culled from Swedenborg, Herbert Spencer, Carlyle, Hume, Schopenhauer, Bergson and many others. After reading Annie Besant's *The Riddle of Life* I noted down a single comment: 'Doesn't answer it'. A comment which, so far as I was concerned, would have applied to all the other philosophers also, with one exception. After reading the *Dialogues of Plato* my comment was 'Satisfying' and this testimony to what I found in Plato stands good for me to-day as it did fifty years ago.

There came a day when my mother discovered me with a Greek dictionary in one hand and a Loeb classic in the other, struggling to read Euripides. Hugo's manuals she had previously regarded with less disapproval; after all, modern languages were some use, you could speak them, but Greek! From that day she realised with

a sad finality that her younger daughter was incurably peculiar. There was only one thing to do. She would cash in on this peculiarity by boasting among her neighbours, particularly among those who seldom opened a book, about her daughter's brains. She would lead the conversation round to unknown languages and then she would say casually: 'When my daughter has a fancy for reading any particular book that is not English, she just sits down and learns a new language so as to be able to read it'. She contrived to suggest that I would read a foreign book like one who makes a pudding quickly and serves it up for lunch. She was facing the inevitable in her own way. If she *had* hatched an ugly duckling she would at any rate display it as a prodigy and enjoy the neighbours' admiration.

As for myself, whenever those boasting words were repeated to me, which they invariably were, I was filled with fury. Was it really true, neighbours would ask, that I learned one language to read one book. I would be furious not with my poor mother's efforts to find compensation for her misfortune but with the mentality of those ignorant Philistines who persisted in labelling me as clever because I was perusing a grammar. I knew only too well that any fool can try to learn something new and that I was only a dull plodder. Those people affixed the label 'clever' without any regard for success or failure.

Despite all this persistence in reading many books, there are only two points in the wide field of literature on which I can now claim a little specialized experience; the choice of books for the rucksack on a walking tour and the question of reading certain books in certain places.

The seasoned walker will never, of course, take a weighty or a bulky book in his pack and a book-respecting person will never expose a treasured binding to the exigencies of such travel. Small and shabby volumes are the best ones for a tramp's companionship. You must never forget that on any day of such journeying your little book of poems, or your little pocket *Odyssey* may emerge in the evening pulpy with rain-water, since a pack will sometimes leak where it presses on the shoulders. The pages of your books may

get cockled in sunshine or torn by a gust of wind, the print may become blurred by stain of moss or flowers that inadvertently you put in as a marker when you were reading in a field or wood or beside a river; for reading out-of-doors is a happy occupation, although Charles Lamb, in many respects the doyen among book-lovers, confessed that he never was able to 'settle his spirits' to out-of-doors reading. Yet his *Essays of Elia* are themselves most perfect reading for the open air, being written with his inimitably light touch and felicitous blending of wit, wisdom and common-sense.

The outside of your book, however, is the lesser problem on a walking tour. You have to face the fact, before starting, that you cannot cater for every mood that may possess you on the uphill or the downhill road, in comfortless or pleasant lodgings. On some journey perhaps, in a mood of quiet companionship with Nature, you long for a W. H. Hudson or a Richard Jefferies or for Izaak Walton and then you remember that in your pack there is only a detective story and a volume of Browning's shorter poems. Such moments are bound to occur. It is useless to set out forearmed against the onset of any one mood, for inevitably some other will win the day, stirring regret for a particular old friend left at home on the shelf.

Once I came to a little inn with draughty windows and a smoky hearth; it was autumn. The rain came down in torrents and the gale discovered crevices in the walls. I was cold, alone and dismal. I took out my whole library and tried to dry my pack in the smoke. There was *Wuthering Heights* which would only accentuate my depression. There was also *A Shepherd's Life* and *The Complete Angler* and *A Week on the Concord*, each more defiantly and mockingly serene than the last. I wanted something exciting, something brilliant or rapid.

I longed (shall I confess it?) for a Ouida, but of course those bulky three-volume novels in the library never left their home. I had already reached the stage, of which J.T. had written, when I could read Ouida and some few other medium writers as a joke and at that moment in the dismal inn I felt that she would be a very stimulating joke. How 'the gayest and best-born people in

Europe' would laugh and chatter and make love ! How the golden beards of the heroes would gleam as their owners quaffed champagne at breakfast and how their sabres would flash and circle, seldom resting in the scabbard ! How their chargers with glossy flanks would neigh and paw the ground ! And how the heroines, marble-white in moments of anxiety, would, in the hours of courtship, dart irresistible glances from their irresistible eyes ! Attendant on every noun there would be a posse of adjectives, while, with a grand gesture, noble deeds and tragic encounters and emotional scenes would be scattered like largesse across the pages.

On the whole I have found the best companions among essays, especially those of Belloc, Thoreau and Hazlitt, or short stories, especially those of Bret Harte, Edgar Allan Poe and R.L.S. On some occasions selected essays and selected stories from a variety of writers have been rewarding. Some of these will act on the mind as concentrated food does on the body; some will provoke a light and titillating sensation most welcome at the end of a strenuous day; the best will evoke echoes of one's unspoken thoughts.

This can only happen when the writer is one who looks out on land and sea and the moods and movements of humanity with the interested but also disinterested glance of the traveller for whom kings and beggars alike are just so much material for thought, and all beautiful scenes just so much material for feeling. There is no need for such a writer in his wanderings to reach the Antipodes or to explore the land of far Cathay, but his mind must remain open to both little and great things, lending itself, as a quiet pool, to all reflections.

As for that second point, the reading of certain books in certain places, it may happen that the book itself and the place where we first read it are so closely attuned that they will remain for ever a blessed memory, each enhancing the enjoyment of the other. For example, there lingers always an extraordinary clearness in the air above the din and battle of the heroes in Macpherson's *Ossian*, for I first read that book in an Alpine pasture among mountains, where the air was light and pure and the sound of cow-bells came dropping down from above with unearthly music. There was also the time

when I read *Lavengro* beneath the oaks that overhung a hurbling stream and there was utter solitude all day and I never really knew if I were lying beneath those trees in my own water garden or wandering on and on over open roads with that strange friend of the gypsies, or doing both at once, as in the incompatible performance of some dream.

Other experiences when a book and a place were once completely harmonized and are now for ever linked in memory, have become treasures of the mind. There was Walt Whitman, with his *Leaves of Grass* read in Ireland and the strange new freedom found in that book and that country. There was the *Kreutzer Sonata* read in Venice; there was the scent of sweet-brier in a Lincolnshire garden where the great cedar looked down on my new friendship with Maurice Hewlett and the Scandinavian sagas.

Books read at sea will sometimes gain a peculiar flavour; perhaps a reflection has fallen on them from the immense emptiness, or is it the immense fullness, of the confining world of sky and water.

Books read on a long train journey may be enjoyed with sharpened appreciation. Every now and then you will raise your eyes to look out on a hill or river, a flock of sheep, the oxidized silver silhouette of a heron, immobile above its own reflection in a pool, and in that second of time your mind will travel far, returning with new zest to the volume in hand.

For many of us our favourite books are inseparably connected with a sense of security and warmth in long dark evenings when sparks from our wood fire fly up the chimney and perhaps the wind is raging outside and rain is pattering on the window. One lays the book down for a moment to cast another log upon the fire and then settles back into the armchair with some old or new friend; a tale of changing circumstances, intrigue, love or mystery, of adventure and hardships that will enhance one's sense of comfort in the here and now. Dickens, of course, should always be read under such conditions, ghost stories also and the *New Arabian Nights* of R.L.S. and Balzac's *Le Peau de Chagrin*; also histories of travel and exploration that record days and weeks of suffering and endurance and hope deferred. Books on Arctic and Antarctic exploration,

especially, should always be read beside a winter fire. As a matter of fact almost any good book can be read with intensified pleasure beside a wood fire, but for out-of-doors reading the choice has to be more exclusive, and some books would ring slightly out of tune, like a cracked bell, if one read them in the open air.

Books may also be read with purpose, as contrast to surroundings that are dull or difficult. When working in the Southwark slums I read many romantic writers, Maeterlinck, J. M. Synge, Daudet, Romain Rolland, Tagore, D'Annunzio and, of course the poets; they all afforded escape from the dust and poverty of those south London streets. In war-time Rouen, when the canteen work was monotonous and made no tax on the mind, I read Epictetus and Locke; they gave me, as it were, something to bite on.

There are times, however, when a book will be so absorbing that it will blot out the actual scene before the reader. In such a mood one would not register the Taj Mahal nor the Pyramids. There was, for example, my dear cousin Letitia, queen of the Victorian low-brows, who read little but the *Times*, the *Church Times* and *Home Chat* and had a library filled with third-rate fiction for amusing her guests and lending to her neighbours. Once, very long ago, so she told me, she had lost herself completely for several days in one of the greatest books in the world. I was all attention. What *had* she read in those days of long ago, before she collected those dreadful Victorian effusions? The Bhagavad-Gita perhaps? Or Plato? Or perchance Shakespeare? Yet I could not picture Cousin Letitia, with her wholesome optimism and her rigid views on morality, enjoying *King Lear* or losing herself in *Measure for Measure*. It was during her first visit to Venice that the great book fell into her hands. Up and down the Grand Canal, to and fro across the lagoon, she was taken in a gondola but she never lifted an eye to palace or church, never gazed upon the islands, was not even aware of those mysterious side-canals with their overhanging bridges, for during all the days of her stay in Venice her eyes were glued to that book. It was *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins.

There was also the student whom we took out in a motor-boat to see the Helford river. Those oak-lined banks are so beautiful that

we regard them as holy ground; on either side the leafage of the woods, levelled to a smooth green canopy, looks down upon its own reflection in the water. The young man sat in the cabin and uttered never a word; he was reading Goethe's *E Faust*. He never saw those enchanted woods, never heard the music of swan wings beating on the air, nor caught the flash of a kingfisher flying from one shore to another.

Many a time when reading a book I have gained much from the surroundings but never yet have I attained a state of total oblivion like that attained by the student and cousin Letitia. Even when reading *Moby Dick* in the wild Welsh country, while Captain Ahab's adventures gained something from the presence of the mountains, those mountains themselves seemed to become heightened and inaccessible during that incredible quest for the white whale.

So, as the years went on I read with avidity, always looking for something that I never found in its entirety in any one book. Sometimes I would pursue, through a labyrinth of words, just as one might follow a will-o'-the-wisp over unknown country, some meaning that was brooding in the whole book but never clearly revealed itself on this page or that. Now and then I would feel, when reading, that intimate sense of well-being, older than the hills, which I always experience when I dabble my hands in flowing water, or breathe the scent of sweet-brier, or look into the eyes of a friend, or sit quietly on a boulder with sunlight falling on my face. All these things would bring a sudden new sense of exhilaration strangely blended with some ancient knowledge long ago forgotten. So I read and read, always seeking for I knew not what. The meaning of life? The purpose of man? The discovery of absolute beauty? I do not know.

Yet a feeling persisted that I never should discover what I sought for unless I could travel in the wild, unpeopled parts of the world and I continued to read books with the assiduity of a gleaner, picking up ears of corn by hand, but from all my reading the world gained no advantage and I myself but very little wisdom.

CHAPTER II

: BUSH HOMES IN QUEENSLAND :

Soon after the Armistice I found myself setting forth on a voyage round the world, not on the journey of my dreams in search of uninhabited places but despatched on a family mission.

My brother's return to Queensland after the war and my sister's absence in far countries where her husband was always testing mines for gold, left me as the sole prop of the family when my father fell ill. In strict accordance with the etiquette of our civilization the doctors prolonged his agony by operating on him for cancer of the oesophagus, and for five months thereafter a nurse and I kept him alive by artificial feeding. He had always been a man of few words and now he wasted none on his own condition; he faced it gallantly without complaint.

Meanwhile my brother's return to the loneliness of bush life after several war years with the sociable Dorset Yeomanry seemed to be almost more than he could bear and his depressed letters began to take a suicidal tone. Even my mother was alarmed, although to the end of her days she never could realise that he had not the temperament for standing up to loneliness; he was like a tree that could not thrive alone but must draw support and comfort from companions in a forest. However he was the breadwinner of the family and my mother decided to send me out to him for six months. Soon after my father's death I started on an overcrowded ship for Suez, Colombo, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, making plans to return via New Zealand and Vancouver. Many fellow passengers, having been caught and kept in England throughout the war, were now returning to their work or their homes in Africa, in the East and in Australia. Never before nor since have I felt such loneliness as I felt on that voyage, with the horrors of illness fresh in my mind and unknown troubles ahead. Often I felt as if I were sitting on a deck-chair in the middle

of Piccadilly Circus, watching the strangers pass from dawn to dusk.

When forced to live in a crowd one is apt, at first, to dislike every face and figure, but gradually types will assert themselves, affording amusement, curiosity or interest and later, perhaps, one may find a friend or two. Why are crowds hateful and individuals precious? I do not know. I suspect that if one really knew any person one would discover something likeable in him. Most of us try habitually to conceal our feelings and it may be that in so doing we conceal what is likeable in ourselves. There is much food for thought in one's own reactions to living in a crowd.

That second visit to Queensland was so different from the first that it might have been a visit to another country.

First of all I was travelling alone, free from the parental control that was always stifling impulses and pushing duty into the forefront of daily life. My father had a simple outlook and natural joie-de-vivre but I do not think that my mother ever experienced spontaneous happiness and, involuntarily perhaps, she quenched that light in him, while we of the younger generation had to seek for the joy of living outside our own home. Then also, on this journey I was some ten years older and had gained much in powers of appreciation. Moreover the mere fact that Michael's Ford car had, to a certain extent, replaced the buggy and the buckboard, had made a revolution in his life. As for his depression, it had been caused by an abortive love-affair from which he had now disentangled himself and he had, in his letters home, magnified his own misery by the eloquence of his pen.

I soon discovered that our neighbours were multiplied by the existence of the car. Station-owners who had formerly met only in the Rockhampton Club were now within visiting distance of each other. Sometimes we would drive a hundred miles or more to spend a week with friends. Then also we would drive to remote parts of our own station, on fishing or shooting expeditions, to some salt-water creek to watch for an alligator or cast the net for fish, to some lonely beach where the fish-hawk had nested on a monolith for uncounted years, to a distant lagoon to shoot a duck for the pot.

Sometimes we would drive across the plain to watch the emus and native companions, standing high on their stilt-like legs, walking to and fro with stately movements, in a remote corner of that level grass land which lay, like a yellow pool, encircled on all sides by gum trees. The grass was always yellow except when it came up young and green after being burnt and even then it would be emerald green for only a few days. We set out on all these expeditions to enjoy ourselves and we succeeded.

There was one neighbour about whom Michael was often talking, a widow, well-known as a cattle-breeder. One day he said : 'We'll go there next week-end. It's more like an English home than any place I've come across in the bush.'

I began to picture something at once cosy and cultured, filled with books, good pictures and a good piano, also upholstered arm-chairs. Hitherto all the bush homes I had seen were exactly alike. They were wooden bungalows with bare floors or perhaps a mat or two, tables, beds, hard chairs and a minimum of cupboards. The only comfort would be found in the mosquito-wired verandah, where the men monopolized the rocking-chairs. My brother had many books, mutilated by those agile insects known as silver fish, and also a wheezy old piano, but for the rest his furnishings were the same as in other bush homes.

I was ill-prepared for the luxury of our week-end. Comfort? Yes. Cosiness and culture? No. From the first moment I was supremely uncomfortable in that opulent atmosphere. It was a large, one-storied house in a wilderness of gum-trees, surrounded by out-buildings, garage, ice-house, electricity house, hut for a Chinese gardener, farm buildings, stock-yards and stockmen's quarters. Inside were white wall-papers, thick carpets, ornate Indian cabinets and tables, with minions flitting about like attendant shadows. After hot buttered-toast and pineapple-flavoured cake for tea, we were escorted to our rooms for an hour's rest. Later, two shadows arrived to lead me to the bathroom; one had already turned on the water and sprinkled in bath salts, the other carried a hot towel on her arm. I felt relieved when they left me alone to soap myself.

Our hostess, a complete woman of the world, was well groomed

but immensely fat, with small shrewd eyes and flat features nearly lost in folds of flesh. She could talk about anything in heaven or earth with an unchanging, detached, superior manner. She even told us a remarkable story of a ghost that she had seen, without altering her tone or her attitude; she might have been giving us a recipe for seed-cake. Only when cattle were mentioned did she betray any enthusiasm. She was not boastful about her riches, she just sat there, surrounded by all the luxury that her mind could devise and her wealth could provide, quietly superior to our concerns. Her hospitality was lavish and persistent. After a five course dinner in which a couple of ducks followed an outsize turkey, we settled down to coffee and talk. There was a harassed-looking niece-companion called Charlotte, who had never a moment's peace, for the aunt was continually urging her to offer us liqueurs and cigarettes and marrons glacés.

Poor Charlotte looked as if all spontaneity had been squeezed out of her by perpetual orders, only when Michael talked to her and teased her did she appear to be alive. He always paid attention to old people and governesses and dependents. However he kept his end up in all the discussions on cattle and even seemed to be at ease with our hostess when she reverted to other subjects. 'He has been seduced and charmed by her riches,' I thought.

For my part I felt there was something ruthless about Mrs Crowdie-Roll. I was afraid of her and of the hard, dominating spirit that wealth had bred in her and I felt much more in tune with the subservient and rather foolish Charlotte.

Our hostess had not travelled widely but it was apparent from her talk that she had always kept her shrewd little eyes open, seeking distraction, observing human foibles, so that while she talked of this and that we had rich entertainment. After a while, however, even my gregarious brother began to flag in his responses as he sat leaning forward in his chair, elbows on knees, hands clasped before him in an attitude of attention, with his head jerking down every now and then in an agony of sleepiness. Charlotte meanwhile was nodding helplessly and forlornly in the least comfortable chair and I was longing for hooks to hold up my eyelids. We had all

eaten far too much and it was 2 a.m. when Mrs Crowdie-Roll paused and said, ignoring Charlotte and looking pointedly first at me and then at Michael : 'Now, tell me something amusing'. There was no response. We were both in some No-Man's Land, far beyond the power to be amusing or even amused. So she rose slowly from the depths of her chair, stubbed out her cigarette, refrained from saying 'What dull dogs I have been entertaining' and remarked in a casual tone : 'Perhaps it is bed-time'. My brother and I looked at each other. Our usual bed-time was nine o'clock.

Next morning we were taken out for a picnic on the wide river below the house, it was only five minutes walk distant but a chauffeur came round to drive us there, down a rough road and then a steep bank of sand where wheels had worn hard tracks. We all stepped into a motor-boat shining with paint and brass and entirely filled, so it seemed, with soft cushions. A black boy staggered aboard with a vast luncheon basket, fetched another basketful of iced drinks and then took up his position as look-out in the bows. The chauffeur followed with the guns, doubled himself up in the bottom of the boat, started the engine and took the tiller.

We steamed up river, the noise of the engine silenced all talk and suddenly I was in another world. A stretch of blue water lay ahead between narrow belts of green trees and beyond those belts lay leagues of ragged grey gum-trees and beyond them the mountains. The faces of my five companions faded out. I was overhead in the air, flying among the pelicans between the blue sky and blue water, then among the white cranes with their long legs stretched out behind them and their necks curved into the shape of a goitre; I was in a flock of brilliant little birds flying in and out among scarlet flowers of the ti-trees; I was swimming with the ducks and water-hens and coots that were black dots on the shining water and was revelling in a world of coolness. As we moved forward up one reach of blue water to the next and the next, there would always be another bend ahead and always the river was bordered by an emerald margin, on either side, of scrub trees. I felt as if we were travelling forward into the very heart of an unknown continent.

I was roused by shots beside me, two birds fell into the water, the

chauffeur quickly changed our course, the black boy stooped over the bows to retrieve the ducks. Michael and our hostess were re-loading their guns, Charlotte was handing round iced drinks, the unknown continent had receded, we were just four ordinary people, shooting and talking and drinking in a reach of a river.

That evening we attacked another whole turkey during another five course dinner but we went to bed earlier. 'You must come again,' said Mrs Crowdie-Roll, as we were settling into the Ford car next morning, but I knew that she did not mean what she said. 'You must come and stay with us,' said my brother to Charlotte, as he shook hands and thanked her and he did mean what he said.

Our next week-end was spent in a more simple home. We drove to it, a distance of some seventy miles, over a track that was called a road but it had no right to the name. True, it was not encumbered with growing trees and once in a while, when we came to the black soil district, the marks of wheels could be seen, lightly printed in sand or sunk into mud, but except for those two distinctions from the surrounding forest of gum trees it might have been untravelled country and we might have been discovering our own course in an unknown land. Now we were driving through long grass or dodging tree stumps, or straddling holes, or avoiding fissures and ruts of every shape and size, and now were crossing a gully that was a dried-out water-course with sloping rock shelves and strewn boulders, when the angle of the car would be such that I never expected it to run on level wheels again.

In English traffic Michael never learned to be a good driver but in the bush he drove a car as a trained workman uses his accustomed tool, with confidence in its power and his own efficiency. Indeed there was one expedition when we drove through a tract of bush where, so far as we knew, no white man had ever been before; it was covered with a dense growth of fifteen to eighteen feet high gum saplings which were extremely resilient. When we charged them they lay down before us and after we had passed on they sprang up again.

It was nearly dark when we drew up in 'Eliza' at the garden gate of Michael's friends. Overhead on our right was that beautiful,

short-lived glow of the Australian sunset which changes so quickly from orange to clear lemon. Above a slight rise in the ground were the silhouettes of gum trees with ragged leaves and irregular branches imprinted in minutest detail on the sky. So often I would watch those native trees outlined on a sunset and they would always seem to be a symbol of the lonely continent that had not yet been trimmed and 'finished' by over-population. While I was gazing at that evening glow, a dark figure emerged from the house, greeted us and led me up the wooden steps to the verandah, while Michael drove Eliza round to the yard to look for his friends, the three brothers.

Miss Bell, aunt and housekeeper to the three, was rather a tongue-tied person and we stood on the verandah for a moment or two, neither of us knowing how to make any contact with the other. I could see the three men outside in various attitudes of work; one came leading some horses to a drinking trough, he was a tall, gaunt figure in long breeches that reached far below the knees and short gaiters that came just above the ankles. The others were in dungaree trousers and shirt sleeves, one was shouting at some cattle in the yard and one, in a state of indescribable grime, was bending over a leaking tap, completely absorbed in the job of mending it. Later I discovered that he was always mending something or helping somebody. He was the smallest of the three and I knew at once that he must be Ted, my brother's special friend. Miss Bell pulled herself together and I followed her broad figure, clad in black dress and check blue apron, through a glass door into a very dark room.

The rapid sunset was already over. Daylight had faded suddenly, as it always does in that part of the world, sunset being a phenomenon of disconcerting swiftness with none of the tenderness of our long-drawn-out twilight. I peered about this small and dark enclosure and could just discern a bed and a white basin on a small table, but I could not see a sign of a mirror or chair or candlestick.

'There are some nails on the wall if you look,' murmured Miss Bell rather awkwardly and I suddenly felt as sheepish as Alice in some of her Wonderland adventures. Was this experience real or

was it a dream? 'You can leave this door open if you want more light,' she said, opening another door at the back of the room and then she disappeared round a corner of the back verandah, leaving me standing in the doorway. I could just discern in the yard a running tap where the men were assembling to wash their hands before supper. I turned to fumble for those nails, undo my pack, hang up a few garments on the wall and tidy my hair as best I could in the darkness. Then, discovering water in the enamel basin, I washed my hands and poured out the water, in approved bush fashion, over the front verandah rail into the garden. 'This,' I thought, 'is the simple life as it should be lived.' I felt happy and at ease; only one thing caused me slight embarrassment. Should I or should I not explore the back verandah and follow Miss Bell into her own precincts where she was, no doubt, preparing to dish up the salt beef and pumpkin? It is so fatal for us in Australia, as I had realised, to take a wrong step in speech or behaviour and to become labelled thereafter as one of those English who 'put on frill'. If I did go and offer to help would it be an intrusion? If I did not go would I be putting on frill?

I took my courage in both hands and groped my way along the back verandah, down a creaking partially boarded-in covered way towards a light that was burning in what I took to be an out-house. It proved to be a vast kitchen more like a barn than anything else. There I found Miss Bell, hovering over the vegetable dishes with a motherly eye while she clasped in both hands an enormous aluminium tea-pot.

One by one the men appeared in the dimly lit kitchen and each of the three brothers shook hands with a hearty 'Pleased-to-meet-you' greeting which gave me a warm sense of welcome, but no cue for my own reply. They were all brushed up for the evening, wearing dark suits and each wore also a wisp of a tie, leaving a large collar stud exposed. We passed in procession to the dining-room, each carrying plates or a dish and then, while the aunt presided behind that gargantuan tea-pot, the eldest nephew solemnly mutilated an enormous fowl which had been killed in our honour. Having strewn the fowl's dish with bones and meat, he spooned these out in por-

tions, then heaped onto each plate, from the vegetable dishes round him, piles of pumpkin and sweet potatoes, crowning each edifice with a torrent of gravy.

Meanwhile talk flowed on without effort. The youngest brother was the only silent one, he was the best-looking and the least hard-working of the three. All his thoughts were centred on a trip he was about to make to the Northern Territory and a bushman does not easily think about two things at once, so he paid little attention to the rest of us. The second brother had fought in France during the war and had acquired a certain breadth of view in his travels; he talked freely of many lands and many men. Miss Bell spoke only when it was a question of tea, milk, sugar or the re-filling of cups. The eldest brother, Ted, was most interesting.

At first I was only aware of his long carving knife, bright collar-stud and a lock of straight black hair that he was always pushing back from his forehead; then I noticed that he had a sensitive mouth and after a while I became acutely and uncomfortably aware that his eyes were habitually seeing other things than the food on the table, and the faces assembled round it, and that he had in his mind other things than cattle, horses, windmills, the condition of grass, trees and mustering yards. What was he seeing? When the food was duly dispersed we began to talk. He had never left Australia, he had been to a good school and in the days before and after school had never known any other life than bush life. He had hardly any trace of the typical Australian drawl and he had the most unusual vocabulary of long words which he often placed in the wrong context. He was an ardent reader and I began to realise that he was, to a large extent, self-educated.

Ted had a great gift for mockery which he expended, for lack of wider experience, on satirical descriptions of his neighbours, mocking in an original manner with words that cut to the bone of his subject, mocking at sentiment, at heavy honesty, at softness, at slow thinking, at stolidity, but all the time he had an eye for everyone's comfort. He it was who noticed and refilled the empty plate or passed the empty cup of tea; he it was who fetched the water after supper and helped his aunt with the washing up and stacking, while

we hovered round smoking cigarettes and drying a plate now and then in a perfunctory manner.

After supper we talked to the accompaniment of a wheezy gramophone and all the time I was wondering about those eyes. What had they seen? What were they seeing now? Some world to which the rest of us were habitually blind? Surely he had some inner vision, for often when he spoke he seemed to be looking through his listener into some far-away world that was his exclusive preserve. Had he obtained the Third Eye of the Lamas? Was he a poet who had never yet been able to express himself? I did not know and I never shall know. In all the subsequent years, when he remained my friend as well as my brother's, I never got behind the wall of cynicism that he raised between himself and the world as protection against things that hurt or threatened him in some unknown way. Nor did I ever cease to wonder at his completely unselfish life, for he remained the unmarried head of the family and the breadwinner; through wet seasons and droughts, in good seasons and bad, he made a centre where all his relatives, and eventually their children, would always find a welcome.

On the Sunday of that week-end, after Ted had helped his aunt with various chores, we all rode round the station looking at mobs of cattle. While the others were appraising heifers Ted and I tied up our horses and wandered along the banks of a creek, talking of this and that and he sprinkled his talk with high-sounding words acquired and only partially digested in his promiscuous reading, and I thought what a wonderful orator he would have made. He had a deep feeling for words. Suddenly we saw a large fish rise in the muddy water and he produced a small quantity of explosive that he had brought out for stunning fish, this being one of the customary Sunday diversions in bush life. Quick as a knife he unpacked the charge and flung it into the water. 'That was a large barramundi,' he said, when the water had settled, 'I'll strip and go in.' I took this as a hint that I should saunter off to a little clearing beyond our horses. Within three minutes he reappeared, head looking like the head of a seal, triumphant with a large fish which we cooked and ate for supper.

On Monday morning the brothers appeared at seven o'clock breakfast clad in clumsy looking brown jerseys, khaki drill trousers and elastic-sided boots. At that time of year there would sometimes be an early frost, dispersed always an hour or so after dawn. The beauty of hoar-frost on that yellow grass was a strange sight that I never can forget; one could almost drink the coolness of the early morning air, knowing that by noon one would be sweating in tropic heat. After breakfasting on a heavy stew of salt beef, pie-melon jam, home-made bread and tea from the family pot, we wasted no time over flowery speeches, we thanked Miss Bell, we thanked the brothers, we made plans to come over for another week-end and then, while the three went off to their stock-yards, we took to the road in Eliza.

Soon afterwards we returned there for another week-end and found Miss Bell in the kitchen, tea-pot in hand, or in both hands I should say, as if she had not been parted from it since we left. Indeed that is more than likely since the Australians habitually drink tea seven times a day. Michael always rallied her about her tea-pot and told her she was like a beadle with his mace or a constable with his baton and then he would chat with her, as he chatted with every other human being, and she always had a special smile for him. In her lonely Martha life she had not much opportunity for smiling, so her mouth had become rather rigid. Two cattle-buyers were also spending the week-end there, they slept in beds made up on the verandah and talked only of stock, beef and market prices, while at meals they never addressed Miss Bell, who sat silently behind her tea-pot, except to say 'Please' or 'Thank you' when their cups were refilled.

Ted had promised me that on this visit he would try to give me my heart's desire; I longed above all things to see and to shoot an alligator. So after Sunday breakfast we set forth with his rifle while the others went off to inspect cattle in a remote paddock. We rode over level country for many miles, it was strangely monotonous country, with a little grass clearing and then trees rather thinly scattered and then the same again and again, with never any distinctive landmark. Now and then the trees would be a group of

upright skeletons where they had been ring-barked. Those trees were a sad sight; bereft of sap in their stems, bereft of the leafage that had given them power to drink the rain and respond with music and movement to the wind; with all hope of growth gone from them for ever, those gaunt grey forms standing upright with barren arms were the very picture of despair.

'No labour to cut them down,' said Ted, reading my thoughts, 'so we kill them by ring-barking to increase the grass below. Sometimes if you ring-bark a grove and happen to miss out one or two trees they will die in sympathy.'

After many miles we came to the salt water creek, tied up our horses and walked along the bank, cat-footed and silent. It was an eerie place, there was a silence like the silence that you can almost hear on a mountain top. The water was a very pale green, there was something evil about its colour and it was so still that you would think no living creature had ever breathed on its surface or lurked in its depth. It was not easy to realise that day after day and night after night, although the place where we stood was many miles from the open sea, that water responded to the ebb and flow of tropic tides. The creek was about thirty yards wide, the white sand of the near beach was dazzling in the tropic sunlight but the far bank was a mud wall about fifteen feet high, rising sheer from the water. Beyond that wall was a belt of grass country, pale yellow, broken by a single group of melancholy ring-barked trees that stood as if they had been petrified by a few strokes of the axe into permanent rigidity, beyond them was the monotonous grey-green forest and far beyond that forest was a range of blue mountains.

Ted murmured under his breath: 'This is the place. Watch out.' We moved slowly, scanning one bank and the other in turn. It seemed to me that my heart had stopped beating and would never beat again, I had the breathless sensation of one who has run too fast and this sensation, which was merely a feeling of suspense intensified, persisted while we moved on like figures in a slow-motion picture.

At last he stood still and without moving his hand from his side he pointed one finger to the opposite bank. There, sunning himself

on the very edge of the bank, lay a huge alligator. He must have been about sixteen feet long but he seemed to fill our whole world. Surely he could not be real. He was like a picture of some dreadful creature filling the whole page of a book. I moved on after my companion as if I were in a dream. He stopped beside a tree and handed me the rifle. 'Press it sideways against the tree,' he said, 'and keep steady and take your time. Aim just behind the eye.'

The scales of that horrible creature stood out clearly, I could see every one of them, I could also see his cold, malevolent eye. I took my time until I got a little more accustomed to the shape and the horror of the thing on the far bank and then I fired. There followed a single movement in that quiet place, a movement that I never shall forget, it is imprinted on my mind's eye clearly, indelibly, as if it were something tattooed in my flesh. The alligator opened his enormous mouth, the jaws seemed to extend far backwards along his body. It was like the movement of a colossal yawn but actually it was his death gesture. Then he rolled sideways with a single effort of his whole long form, from the top of the bank into the water. We watched the swirl, there was now mud and blood in that green river. We remained watching for a long time but never another sign of the monster did we see.

'He has crept into some hole in the bank,' said Ted, 'probably under some old tree-root.' As we turned away to mount our horses and ride back, he added: 'We will watch the place for you. It is possible that after several days the corpse may float.'

'I *should* have liked to take home the claws for a trophy,' I said ruefully as we trotted home.

'Never mind,' he said with a grin, 'you got the alligator all right.'

: LIFE ON A CATTLE STATION :

It seems a long journey to take from England to the Antipodes in order to learn that grammar need not be a dry-as-dust subject and that the study of it can be a sheer delight. Yet that is exactly what I did learn when I began to take lessons in 'black-feller' language by word of mouth from old Willic. 'Began' I say advisedly, for there was soon a dead end to his capacity for teaching. At first each word that I learnt would be always united with the seen thing that it stood for and there would be peals of laughter, between the acquisition of one word and another, from the teacher.

Old Willic was the last of our aborigine employees. He had the blackest face I ever saw. It was a wonderful sight to watch him on his little pony, 'cutting out' individual cattle from a mob, for he rode with speed and judged with precision. He was always clad in shirt, dungaree trousers, elastic-sided boots and a felt hat adorned with threaded oval fragments of mother-of-pearl shells as protection from the Evil one. The lesson always began with the human body. This was how it went. 'Yelli (hair) Mel (eye) Woorroo (nose) Irra (tooth) Moolloo (lip) Nelli (hand) Boolloo (stomach) Oongal (back) Tarrayah (leg) Karkirri (knee) Pinna (foot).'

Then there came gradually one by one, as we happened to see each object when we were riding after cattle, the names of certain birds and animals. 'Kayaboolloo (swan) Mirri (opossum) Tookirri (carpet-snake) Marroon (goanna) Koorra (kangaroo) Warlmarl (native bear) Yarriman (horse) Koova (fish) Romarroo (flying fox) Barraballa (dugong) Kerooen (porcupine) Koodenoo (bandicoot) Koorroo (duck).

After learning these I turned to more general terms. What is 'brother?' I asked him. 'Maccommboolloo,' he replied, this being his own tribal name. 'No,' I said, waving one hand vaguely in the air, 'not your brother, not Willie's brother, just brother.' 'Young

feller boss,' he replied promptly. I waved both hands, trying to express generality and repeated 'brother, brother, anybody's brother' but such a general term was outside his ken. So we returned to visible things, moving away from what we could actually touch at that particular moment and from animal and human life to the greater forms of nature, and then I learned some beautiful words and also some very strange ones.

'Alli (water) Wayi (fire) Karka (moon) Candallay (star) Carrayi (sun) Wārroon (sand) Yellam (shell) Coochirri (grass) Boomboolla (ground or country) Kallay (rain) Pulirri (sky) Nornoo (cloud) Tarra (river) Wandoo (mountain) Kooranna (sea); also Tararara (boat) and Colpeur (egg).'

After that came the names of one or two invisible things and by appropriate mine of shivering I learned 'Coomberi' (cold), by wiping sweat from my brow I acquired the word 'Karemarl' (hot) and when I closed my eyes and put my head on one side old Willie murmured 'Koonim' (sleep), as he laughed and laughed again.

Among numerals we never got beyond 'Wangai' (one) and 'Blarri' (two) and 'Oong-oong' (three). Sometimes when I asked him to tell me about his tribe's corroboree he would chant in a nasal voice these strange words, rising every now and then to a high note that gave one an indescribable nostalgic sense of something far away and long ago.

'Ad im Birri. Pan gim Birri. Ad im Birri. Pan gim Birri. Kakiago. Kakiago. Kanaka corroboree. Boomboolla. Kyiva.'

His wife Kitty had white hair or, as he described it, 'plenty flour-bag come up yelli'. She lived in a government reserve of natives a hundred miles down the road and one day he sent her some money by the mail asking her to get him some opium. She bought the opium, smoked it herself and sent him the ashes in a match box. That word of his corroboree 'Kikiago' always sounded like the wail of a lost spirit but I do not think old Willie felt lost. He was well fed and he had his own shed to sleep in and plenty of clothes, including some bizarre striped jerseys. He loved his work and he

loved his 'little-feller-pony' and he was given a nip of whisky every evening. His presence among us was like that of a happy child.

There were other highlights in bush life besides 'Grammar made easy'. There were long days fishing in the creek or on the sea-coast and long mornings helping to muster cattle or riding alone across the plain when the world would seem to be full of golden air. There were visitors. There was also, most memorable of all, one solitary morning in the mangrove swamp.

Sometimes, with short fishing rods, we would fish from the rocks beside the open sea, catching blue fish up to eight pounds or so. They made a welcome change from salt beef. Sometimes we would net the mouth of a creek on a falling tide and catch a variety of fish. One of our best picnic days was when we drove Eliza to a very lonely place on the coast, armed with rods and nets, intent on seeing the ancestral fish-hawk's nest of which old Willie had so often told us. That was the occasion when Eliza negotiated tall gum saplings that bowed down before her like courtiers and then, as she passed onward without leaving any track, rose up again to their full height. There was little grazing on that part of the station, in fact it was almost unknown country and Willie was the only living person who could guide us to that nest with any certainty. It was cool when we started in the early morning and the old man had donned his favourite black and yellow jersey which gave him the appearance of an enormous wasp. On the way we passed Old Toorilla where one of our great-uncles was killed by the blacks. There was no tombstone nor memorial in that place, it was just a bay of grass land enclosed by trees. Our two great-uncles had, however, a firmly-rooted memorial in the family tradition and many a time when we were children we would persuade my father to repeat to us the tale of his uncle Frank Newbold who was forced to eat his boots after being shipwrecked on the way to Australia and of Uncle Willie Newbold who met his violent death on the Queensland plain.

My mother would never speak of those great-uncles by marriage, she did not think they adorned the family pedigree but we children all felt it was a fine distinction to have such people among our

ancestors. So on that day as we drove in the Ford across the little bay of grass named Old Toorilla, we thought of Uncle Willie, if not actually with the 'passing tribute of a sigh', at any rate with grateful memory. We came out of that forest of pliable saplings and drew up on a level place above the sea and there was the fish-hawk's nest below us, a pile of loose sticks considerably larger than a raven's nest occupying the summit of a rock, shaped like a chess-board castle, that must become an island at every high tide.

As we stood on that low cliff above the rock we commanded a wide view of land and sea. Stretching away into far distance to right and left were beaches of golden sand; many of these Queensland beaches are so hard that you can gallop a horse for miles along them. Out on the sea horizon the islands were lost in a heat haze, but to south and west, where there was actually neither island nor promontory, there were mysterious forms quivering in a mirage. There was no living thing in sight, neither bird, nor animal, nor man, the fish-hawk did not appear; there was hardly a ripple on the sea. I felt that we, Michael, old Willie, Eliza and myself were intruders here, for I knew at once that our every sound and movement was like a false note in the harmony of the place; by our mere presence it was as if we had seized the exquisite, almost silken fabric of that solitude and had crackled it into pieces.

We got out our fishing rods and climbed down to the beach, Willie produced a sack with the bait he had collected early that morning from the muddy margin of a ti-tree swamp and he proceeded to break up the large shells with a stone, distributing to us the gristly parts of the flesh inside which made the best bait because the fish could not easily suck them off the hook. Then we each chose our own reef of rocks running out into that calm sea and began fishing in about four feet of water, each one of us so far from the other that we were not even within hailing distance.

My mind was not occupied with rod and bait, and blue fish, for all the time I was looking about me and over my shoulder, as if I expected some Presence to arrive suddenly and turn us away. I could not dismiss from my mind the feeling that we were intruders, the place was heavy with a brooding solitude, not the solitude of

some landmark that has seen history and now is standing alone, forgotten and deserted, for there surely had been no history here. The whole scene, land and sea and forest, had an air of being new-minted, just as it was in the dawn of creation.

So often when atavistic memories surge up in one's mind one goes back to the Bible in order to find words with which to express one's feelings. As I stood there fishing on an islet rock, almost hearing the silence, almost touching the solitude of that unvisited shore, a verse from Genesis flashed across my mind : 'And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good'.

Suddenly a great shadow, some fifteen feet long, passed close to my islet and then the shark moved on to deeper water. I also moved, wading back to a higher, safer rock. When we had each caught a few fish, Michael and I repaired to the edge of the scrub for lunch but old Willie would not leave the rocks, he remained there fishing, a lonely silhouette on the pale blue sea and the distant mirage. The tide was ebbing fast and the chances of catching fish were becoming slighter moment by moment, but still he lingered there, refusing to come up the bank for his meat pies and oranges.

Perhaps as he stood there, fishing, fishing with never a bite, his mind had gone back in time and he was lost in the past. Perhaps he was aware of Pine Mountain and Double Mountain far away behind him and all the timbered country and the grassland between himself and them, of the golden beaches that stretched on either hand so far that the ends of them were lost to sight, of the shadowy islands shimmering in haze out there across the water. It may be that, gathering all this into a single thought and feeling, he was once again owner of this land, the hunting ground and fishing ground of his own people. His slight figure, far away on the rocks, was dark against the turquoise sea and no bigger than a dot as we looked down on him from our belt of scrub, but in some strange way that one living form seemed to dominate the silence of those beaches, the stillness of that sea where each ripple came into the shore with the very lightest murmur and movement.

At last he drew in his line to come leaping across the rocks and up the bank for his lunch. Then we turned homeward, Eliza making

for herself another track which, like the first one, closed up again behind us as each sapling rose to its own erect position. We left those beaches to their perennial stillness with never a trace of our coming or going.

Sometimes, when the stockmen, old Willie and my brother were mustering cattle, I would ride out in the morning to join them at a given rendezvous. Their day's work would begin at 3 a.m. and at noon, when it became too hot for man and beast alike, they would all repair to the nearest shady grove and brew black tea before riding home. Only when they were mustering near home or in a paddock with which I was familiar would I join them, knowing that it is not easy for a 'new-chum' to find his way in that country.

All too well I remembered the day, in our earlier visit to Queensland when my sister and I got 'bushed' and how foolish we felt. We had been told to ride to Jesse's lagoon to join my father; we knew the place well; we merely had to leave the road at a certain tree-stump, turn to the right and ride for half-an-hour in a straight line through the trees. There was only a single road, a buggy track, on our station, it led to the nearest town, a hundred and twenty miles away. Here and there on the plain it petered out but it was always well marked in the timber country. We rode and rode and each ridge of wooded land looked exactly like the last, but we felt quite sure that we were riding straight. We rode for an hour in the silent hush and then suddenly we came out on a well used track. I shall never forget that feeling of being disoriented. What had happened? There *was* no road here, we had left the only road an hour ago. We were looking at something that did not exist. It was as if the sun had risen in the west. We felt giddy with anxiety as I had felt once when my bicycle brakes failed downhill and after being pitched headlong over the handle-bars I found myself looking uphill instead of down and felt as if the earth had changed its contours. Now, suddenly my sister and I spied a tree stump twenty yards away. We looked at each other, then at the stump, then we laughed rather sheepishly. We had ridden in a complete horse-shoe, nearly joined at the tips and had come back to our own road just twenty yards nearer the distant town than when we left it. Eventu-

ally we did find Jesse's lagoon by following a dry water-course that sloped imperceptibly downward.

I was getting intimate with the country now but even so I was always given a landmark when I rode out alone to join the men at their work, a landmark visible from my brother's house which stood, near the inland end of the station, overlooking the great plain and its surrounding forest.

One morning I was riding across this plain to join the men and a buyer who had come up to inspect and purchase cattle and was staying with us for a couple of nights. I could actually see the point I was bound for, it was a line of trees running out into the grassland in a curve, a place where there would be shade for the beasts and also room to manoeuvre the herd from which the buyer would pick out the animals one by one. That particular ride, alone, was one of the highlights of my six months in Queensland. There was nothing dramatic about it, there was nothing unusual in the scene, I did not see any rare birds; the sun shone as it shone, or so it seemed to me, all day and every day. It was just one of those hours when the mind will become, without apparent cause, a sensitive plate for registering the beauty of the world.

How true it is, as Colette wrote, that 'The earth belongs to anyone who stops for a moment, gazes and goes on his way, the whole sun belongs to the lizard who basks in it'.

I can live through that morning ride again and again. Cantering across the golden plain with a sense that the whole world is golden, past and present, mountain and plain, grass and forest, all resolved into this one particular golden hour, suspended, sublimated. Cantering along the level golden plain, seen so often from above, yet in reality the plain is neither golden nor level for like the desert it is streaked with many colours, there are patches of grey soil thrown up by the rats and baked into hard clay full of crevices, there are fleshy salt plants, a tawny red, survival of that time when all this land was under the sea, there are little plots of marine couch-grass, feathery, pale green. Cantering along the plain with a glorious sense of ease, with a movement that demands from the body neither the effort of trotting nor the tense attitude of gallop-

ing. Riding up and down billows of gently rolling grassland, as if one were breasting one long, low wave after another and on every side in the distance is a shimmering heat haze wherein there are only elusive forms that come and go. Only that group of trees towards which I am riding are established in clear outline. So I ride on and on, confined in this golden moment between all known experience and that which is yet to come

Those cattle-buyers' days were the best and the most exciting of all our activities. The mob would be assembled on the edge of the plain that lay like a great yellow eye in the midst of leagues of country where ridge after ridge was covered with the grey-leaved gum trees. The buyer would point out a certain beast and one of us would be detailed to the task of cutting it out, that is to say of separating it from the main mob and preventing it from straying back into the timber country, while driving it towards two men who were keeping the buyer's rapidly growing mob of animals together. Heading a beast away from those trees was always a difficult task and if I were galloping in pursuit of one I would usually call frantically to old Willie to come and help me, for he and his 'little-feller-pony' always moved here and there like a single flash animated by one purpose.

Once, after the men had finished a two days' muster of the largest paddock, I rode down to meet the oncoming herd. It was a wonderful sight to see that mob of Hereford cattle, many hundreds of them, for our whole herd numbered at one time as much as ten thousand, coming across the plain, the white-faced, red-skinned animals advancing at a measured pace, like some slow primeval force that had never come completely under man's control. Beyond on the other side of the plain the air was shimmering; white cockatoos on the edge of a swamp each assumed the dimensions of a cottage. Far away, towering above the gum forest, were the blue forms of Pine Mountain and Double Mountain. The heat was intense. As one looked at the straw-like grass one felt homesick for a plot of English green lawn and then, glancing up at the blue sky unbroken by any cloud, one's thoughts would turn involuntarily to days of soft west-country mist. Slowly, slowly, the immense herd

came on, not gathering momentum like water, fire or avalanches, but steady, inexorable, with an air of dignity and power. In that huge mob of cattle there was a gathered force lying in wait; if once they were broken up they would be uncontrollable, careering wildly in every direction, but here and now, by the skill of a few outriders, they were kept moving calmly to their destination.

Back in the age of primitive man, when flocks and herds roamed freely, wild owners of wild country, often pursued by man it is true but never penned nor folded nor domesticated, animals had a kind of mystic union with the earth. Now at this moment the herd, by its sheer size, seemed to have regained its age-long union and to be at one with the yellow grass and the grey-leaved trees and the over-all blue sky.

In the matter of visitors there was seldom any question of perfunctory welcomes or unexpected guests, a visitor is neither a duty nor a bore in bush life, for any new face is a luxury.

We had no unexpected guests because our station was a peninsula leading only to the sea. Cattle-buyers would come by arrangement and some of Michael's friends would come by invitation for a week or two. Those who had been reared in the bush would enter naturally without any effort into our routine, there would be no question of entertaining them, except by an occasional fishing picnic; all the time cattle had to be mustered for dipping, weaning or sale, whether there were visitors or not. As for the townies they gave us rich entertainment as we observed their individual ways of accepting the simplicity and even the drawbacks of life on a remote cattle station; the monotony of salt beef and pumpkin pie and sweet potatoes eked out by a few small tomatoes; the prevalence of ants and snakes outside the house and sometimes inside; the scanty furniture, the cracked tones of the old piano; also the endurance of stiff muscles and aching bones after hours in the saddle; all these things were an essential part of a certain sense of freedom to be found in bush life.

Whether they themselves enjoyed that rich entertainment or not is quite another matter. In the case of Charlotte and her visit, however, we knew that the contrast between her stay with us and the past years of servitude and luxury was intoxicating. Padded all round

by wealth in Mrs Crowdie-Rolls' home, she had never had any experience of life on an ordinary cattle-station. She was enthusiastic and gushing about the simplicity and even the discomforts of our existence, and she soon worked herself up into a state of ecstasy in which she would have accepted a bed of thorns and called it cotton wool. The truth was that she had found freedom at last and she set herself to enjoy every moment of every day. She would trail about in the most unpractical long skirt, happily excited by every small event, even by the discovery of ants in the marmalade and the killing of a brown snake on the bathroom steps. She assembled, for her first ride, the strangest motley attire; Michael's heavy burberry, my long riding breeches, her own white sand-shoes and pale yellow spats, her floppy straw hat and, to crown all, hat-pins! She had only ridden six times and that was eighteen years ago and a pretty figure of fun she looked as she went bumping along in a forward-stooping posture. She got palpitations of the heart whenever the horse trotted or cantered, but she would always return from a ride jubilant and smiling.

Every bone in her body must have been aching when we drove her one day in the springless buck-board over some rough country, but she never ceased from smiling and uttering expressions of surprise and delight. One evening, when she had gone to bed exhausted but happy, long before our usual bed-time, Michael murmured, more to himself than to me: 'Poor Thing. First time for nine years she's been allowed to go her own way'.

There was, however, one day visitor, the only one who ever came and went without staying the night, who can hardly be described as a luxury.

'The Bill Dallys are coming to lunch tomorrow,' said my brother one day, 'They're starting early in the buggy so as to avoid the heat. I expect them ten o'clock. I want to take him out to Bark Lagoon to look at cattle. She's a nice woman,' he added apologetically, knowing as well as I did that she was very heavy on hand. 'Very good wife to Bill.' We had often stopped to drink tea with them as we drove up from town. I could at once foresee the whole day in store for me. That large dumb woman seated in a rocking-

chair in the verandah for hours on end and when the talk on food and babies had petered out what *should* we find to say to each other? I voiced these fears.

'Don't worry,' said Michael, thinking only of Bill's valuable advice on cattle. She'd like to have a sleep after lunch in the spare room.' It was a ray of hope. A delusive ray.

They arrived at ten o'clock, had tea and then the men went out. After a morning punctuated by heavy silences and spurts of false animation, they came in to lunch and went off to the yard directly after. I assumed what I hoped was a friendly smile. 'You've had an early start and a long drive Mrs Dally, I expect you'd like to lie down for a little rest.' My remark was a fact rather than a question. 'Oh no,' she said, 'I'd much rather stay on the verandah with you,' and she turned resolutely from the spare-room door that I had opened with a spiderish 'Will-you-come-into my-parlour?' gesture directed to this enormous fly. For Mrs Dally was a very fat woman who really ought, I said to myself indignantly, to rest after a heavy lunch.

However there was nothing for it now but the rocking-chairs, so there we sat, with a few picture papers on the table between us, rocking, rocking hopelessly. I did not like to talk about England, for our life at home seemed very rich in the matter of mere creature comforts compared with hers, so I was racking my brains for topics of conversation; it was like churning butter that would not come. Before Michael and Bill had evaporated they had asked to have tea at four o'clock. It was now one o'clock. Never before nor since have I understood so well the expression 'in the depths of despair'. We had finished with babies and cooking, or so I thought after that long morning séance. Not at all. After a lengthy silence she began again, both subjects being worn threadbare I had nothing to contribute. Then she fell into a complacent silence without ever closing an eye; knowing that I ought to talk gave me an irritable sensation like that of prickly heat. The moments passed very slowly like single drops from a leaking tap. Four o'clock came at last, the men joined us and finally there came the moment of departure with hearty words exchanged between all four of us.

Later in the evening Michael said : 'Do you realise that woman has ~~not~~ seen a soul outside her home except the mail boy and two cattle-buyers for the last fifteen months? Bill told me it was a wonderful outing for her, just to see a new face, she'll think about it for days'. I felt as small and inadequate as half a split pea.

One morning we went to Broad Sound and while Michael and old Willie were fishing in a creek I wandered off to explore the mangrove swamp, keeping along the margin of that great inlet of the Pacific which has one of the biggest tides in the world. It was a strange new world, or perhaps I should say it was a strange very old one in which I found myself. It was a very exciting place. Beautiful? No. Evil? Perhaps. There is certainly something sinister about these monotonous swamps that repel all alien forms of life except the writhing, rubber-textured, greenish yellow creatures that exist in an element of mud. In that swamp there was no intruding tree nor creeper, no flicker of a bird's wing, no sign of any animal; only a few salty plants that led a creeping life on the noxious looking soil. Those mangroves were surely watching, waiting to swallow down into the dark element from which they drew nourishment any intruder.

I moved on slowly, keeping the Sound within sight so as not to lose all sense of direction. The sea was a tossing brown waste of waters streaked with golden sand-bars; far away, skirting the northern shore, was another mangrove swamp covering miles of country but seen from this shore as a mere yellow-green line at the base of a mountain range that was surely set there to cut off further progress of the mangroves. I was beginning to think of them as a single living creature that could threaten, advance and destroy.

A great sand-bank lay at the mouth of the Sound and the tide came swirling round this bank, broadening the expanse of water, filling up the side creeks, licking along the mangroves until their rooted branches, or branching roots, became submerged. Half the life of these trees is spent standing in salt water. That swamp was a very solitary place, I doubt if any white woman had ever set foot in it before. There was no movement in the dim world, not even a stir of wind in the leafage. I wandered on and on in that eerie



THE author's older brother, Michael Rogers in Queenland



THE author's younger brother, Roger P. was Rogers

place where the daylight was pale green, each of my foot-prints would at once be filled with water. The strange trees send up aerial roots that meet, like the spokes of an umbrella, to form the stem.

I sat down on a group of these roots, leaning back against the trunk of the tree and listened in to the silence. The containing walls of familiar life had fallen away. I lost all sense of the passing of time, of the difference between movement and stillness, between silence and sound, between hope and fear and was near to losing my own identity and becoming a single mud-rooted mangrove.

Suddenly I became aware of sounds, they were all round me but they were not emanating from the trees, they were coming up from the mud below, they were popping, crackling sounds made by the unseen crabs down in their dark mud lairs. Had it not been for those sounds that recalled me to the immediate place and moment, I do believe that I should have been drawn back into a timeless past and have become lost in the swamp.

I hurried back to the creek and the two fishermen, in a mood of silent exhilaration. In that memorable hour I had drawn near to Something that always, before and since, I have been seeking, Something half buried in primeval memories.

CHAPTER 13

: ROUND THE WORLD :

There is no doubt that the stimulus of travel does evoke new ideas and will sometimes inspire a writer with unwonted eloquence. Yet this mood of expectancy, of sharpened receptivity that one always takes, like luggage, on a journey, might just as well be cultivated in the daily round at home. We should see many a strange and beautiful scene in the course of any humdrum life if only we were, alerted to perceive them. It is, in fact the deliberate mood of observation that we adopt the moment we have crossed the Channel which provides half the interest and excitement of our travels, our pulse will beat faster as we lean forward to see what lies round the next bend, beyond the immediate horizon and we give ourselves up to the thrill of movement in space. Yet in the dullest life also there is expectancy, for we never know what awaits us and our friends in the next day or week or year and we must all of us undergo, perforce, the thrill of moving onward through time.

Many of the early travel writers carried this alertness of mind too far and spoilt their books by their inability to see the wood for the trees; everything they saw and did had to be chronicled for the benefit of the stay-at-homes who formed such an immense majority, it was if the very fact of treading new country filled them with such a sense of self-importance that they would record every small event of every day, giving to great things and small alike the same attention, a sure method of producing something very dull; a method not unknown to modern travellers.

Speke's books on Africa, for example, bewilder the reader by one description after another of natives, battles, barter, jungle and swamp, until the search for the source of the Nile, the golden thread of his purpose, is again and again lost in tedious narrative. Stanley, on the other hand, in his *Darkest Africa* can rivet the reader's attention throughout the pages of two long volumes. He

has that inexpressible 'Something' by which a writer can attach a reader to himself, and whether that 'Something' is the ability to keep the end always in view or mere gusto I cannot say. Perhaps Stanley had both. In the best travel books, such as Kenophon's *Anabasis*, *Arabia Deserta*, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Scott's *Antarctic Journals*, Cherry Kearton's *The Worst Journey in the World* and Nansen's *Farthest North* this golden thread is ever present in the reader's mind. Even Jules Verne's breathless, improbable, fantastic book *Round the World in Eighty Days* will hold our attention through all the connecting links that bind the episodes together, for the excitement and purpose of the traveller who made that wager is ever present in the reader's mind as he turns page after page, asking himself again and again : 'Will this crazy man win or lose his bet?'

In my lone journey round the world I had no purpose except to visit my brother and, that being accomplished, to return home but I took the experience very seriously and day after day would pertinaciously scribble impressions of things seen and felt, gaining perhaps the facility of a little photographer in producing word-pictures but never making any progress towards the masterpiece of my dreams. I had no idea that I was only repeating history; that I was, in fact, no better and perhaps far worse than the dull aunt who pasted snapshots of Niagara and Fiji on her bedroom screens and thought them beautiful, for I filled many note-books with words about my travels and thought they were literature. It was, however, something in the nature of an apprenticeship for all the time I was gaining more control of the tools of my self-appointed trade.

My brother had now recovered his usual spirits and he decided to take a short holiday and come as far as New Zealand with me on my homeward way, to visit some sheep-farming friends. The five days voyage across from Sydney to Wellington and our journeys in New Zealand were the only stages in my round-the-world travels when I was not alone.

The north island of New Zealand has a quite indescribable atmosphere of strength, terror and largeness. Any description of this atmosphere is likely to be verbose and futile but it was in this

island that, at last, my back-to-nature dreams became reality that surpassed all dreams.

Our host was busy every day with the sheep, our hostess was expecting a baby and my brother spent all his time fishing happily in the wide river of an immensely wide valley. I was free to explore the mountain forest alone. The tree-tops in that forest were far overhead and the place was dimly lighted, there was no glint of sky between the tree-trunks nor in the leafage, on every side the air was like a pale green curtain. My feet moved softly as in a temple, I would often lose the narrow earthen track and find myself stumbling knee-deep in fragments of half-rotted wood or climbing over a fallen tree that dissolved at a touch into humus. It was as if the whole process of birth, death, and renewal were being enacted at that very moment in the forest. On fallen and upright tree-stems alike there were beautiful filmy ferns of every shape and size, silvery-green, semi-transparent like seaweed.

One day, after climbing up through the forest for hours, I came out from that green light to a bald shoulder of the mountain. A 'Southerly' was blowing. This was the local name for the prevailing wind which never seemed to be anything less than a high-force gale. It met me now full in the face, it howled down from the snow-covered ridges above, it whistled and roared up the bush-clad valleys and the stony gorges below as if they were so many funnels. I clung to the Manuka bushes and waited for each gust to subside before moving on in a crouching attitude. It seemed as if that wind were cutting chips off my face and slashing through my body like a knife and trying to blow me off the face of the earth. Suddenly the path led back into deep forest again and to shelter there seemed like being in Heaven itself but I was soon alarmed by an intermittent booming note. Was it a thunderstorm? What about the danger of lightning beneath the trees? But there was no sound of thunder, only a mighty swishing overhead and that roar was only the voice of the wind blowing up the gullies with a reverberating echo. It seemed as if the 'Southerly' were drawing out music from stones and trees alike and were sweeping away all the sins and sorrows of the world with unrelenting force.

One day, after we had left Masterton and had gone on to Rotorua to see the 'sights', we found ourselves in a miniature Hell's Mouth. We were in a guided party, following a sandy track along the hill that was covered with Manuka when we came to a boiling pool that was sending out continuous concentric ripples to the edge of the water and clouds of steam into the air. The ground vibrated beneath us, we might have been standing on the lid of a boiling kettle but it never boiled over, those ghastly ripples were rhythmical and regular. It was this unending threat, without accomplishment, that was so terrifying.

We moved on to a small pool the size of a hip bath, it was full of oily mud and every few seconds there rose from the centre a liquid bubble, as large as a teapot, that would give one sickening heave and then subside. The movements in this pool also were regular as clockwork. There was something horrible about that bubble and its repetitive gurgle which was mocking and derisive. Was it actually a devil? We came, a little further on, to the Pig Hole which was the same size but deeper and more mysterious, for the opening was crooked and from the bottom there rose a continuous cloud of steam, accompanied by choking grunts and every so often the Pig would spit up a handful of boiling mud. When we came to the Devil's Rocking-Chair we saw a pool just like the others, with boiling water and steam rising from the bowels of the earth but we were beginning to feel rather blasé about these seismic phenomena until the guide suddenly said : 'Stand close to me and feel the earthquake'.

As we stood beside that pool we could see the crooked edges of it vibrating to and fro like a shuttle and forming cracks that opened and shut as if worked by machinery. It needed some courage to step forward but we all did so, one after the other. The throbbing underfoot was like the movement of mighty pistons. Which was more terrifying, the sight of those vibrating cracks or the realisation that our solid, familiar earth was heaving about below our feet, in the possession of red-hot demons? We could not tell but we backed away quickly from the edge of that pool.

The climax came when we went, late that evening in a party to

visit the real Hell's Mouth, the famous Karapiti blow-hole. It was a dark night with few stars when we left the car in a lonely place among the hills and followed our guide and his lamp along a rough track, moving down towards a column of smoke outlined on the darkness. Down, down, we went until we were all standing in a hollow eight or ten yards away from the Horror. There was a deafening noise like the noise of many engines, a violent throbbing of the ground underfoot and a volume of smoke belching from a cone-shaped hole and dissolving in the darkness with the speed of a fury, as fast as it was renewed from below. The guide began to collect empty kerosene tins that were lying about and then he placed them in a row beside that ghastly hole. His tall, thin form moving about in the hollow with his lamp, was uncanny, it seemed as if he were preparing to stoke the fires of hell. He soaked a couple of old sacks in kerosene, having brought these stage-props with him, then he put a match to the sacks as he advanced to the very edge of the hole and threw them in. Were the blazing rags a sop to Cerberus? No, they merely made an illumination for tourists. I held my breath in terror as lurid flames now lit up that hole from within and the smoke belched forth faster and faster, assuming sunset hues. At the guide's bidding we came near the hole and looked down, it was about six feet deep and at the bottom there was a narrow slit some twelve inches long. Then one by one we threw in empty kerosene tins and each time they would be shot out again with the force of a bullet. The noise and vibration was so terrific that we felt as if some catastrophe must be imminent. We questioned the guide about our safety.

'This hole,' he said quietly, 'is the safety-valve of New Zealand, as long as any of the Maoris can remember it has been fully active.'

Even after that assurance I could bear it no longer and turning away from the crowd I hurried up the track into the blessed stillness of the night.

There is nothing so capricious as the selectivity habits of memory. How many trivial things do we remember and how many a beautiful scene has faded away or is surviving only as a dry skeleton of words in a diary. We must have travelled several hundred miles

in the north island of New Zealand, yet there is little of the wonderful scenery than I can now recall as an actual picture. I can still see some of those boiling springs and pools; and glimpse from a forest clearing that wide and shallow river in which my brother was fishing many miles below; and a certain dell in the public gardens at Wellington, where we came to a sudden stand-still on hearing the notes of an English blackbird. Not for two years had my brother heard that song. There is also one clear memory of a fellow-traveller whom we met casually and never saw afterwards.

We had exchanged a few words with her one evening in the hotel lounge but she was not responsive and next day I found myself sitting behind her in the train, surrounded by other tourists, looking at her clothes. An impossible person, I thought. During the rest of that Rotomahana expedition I had a chance of talking to her and re-learning the old lesson: 'Judge not that ye be not judged'.

Her yellow hair was hardly grizzled, her age was uncertain and her clothes defied convention. She wore a white panama hat with pink ribbon and orange under-brim and white elastic under the chin, a blouse with a moss-green collar fastened by a lace jabot and a huge cameo brooch, a brownish-pink stockinette jersey and fawn skirt of men's covert-coating material. These garments seemed to accentuate her long body and short legs and to express her perfect freedom from other people's standards. She had a keen, bird-like face, rather wizened, with eyes that looked out as from a watch-tower, white cotton stockings and speckled sandshoes completed her attire and she moved with a quick, padding walk. She was an entomologist, she had spent years in California, months in Fiji, explored the Carpathians and Himalayas, bred horses in Queensland and ridden over country where no woman had ever yet ventured. She was travelling with fifteen hundred live caterpillars and had recently sent home to Hampstead five thousand butterflies and moths. When describing some city full of gardens, I think it was Durban, she said suddenly something that riveted my attention: 'The beauty of it was almost more than I could bear.' Then she added: 'But I am living to see Rio de Janeiro.'

Talking of her background she remarked in a tone of violence : 'How I dislike my grandmothers and what trouble they give me to this very day!' I looked at her with surprise. Surely her grandmothers could hardly be alive still. She seized on my unspoken thought. 'No,' she went on, 'I never actually saw them it's not even their vices that I resent, it is my inheritance of their prudence and conventions, you can't think what trouble I have had to destroy those things.'

'Ah!' I said triumphantly, 'then I met your grandmothers yesterday evening when you refused to go to the Rachel Baths with me.'

Then I told her how, seeking experience as usual, I had gone to the thermal baths, paid my sixpence, taken my towel and heard, that bathing-dresses were prohibited, so had soon found myself hopping naked into a steaming sulphur bath already occupied by a number of sheep-faced elderly females seated with water up to their necks in the same nude condition. Every now and then another nude would issue from behind a curtain, cast its towel on the brink of the bath and step in to join us, becoming, for all social purposes, just a head and neck and a white body submerged in green water.

'You are right,' she said, when she heard what she had missed. 'It was my grandmothers again. They held me back. They are not dead yet. But don't you think that, considering my mother never moved without a maid in her life and never learned how to do her own hair, I have done pretty well?'

'I do,' I answered heartily, 'but will you come to the Rachel Baths with me this evening and kill your grandmothers?'

'On no account,' she said. 'Good-bye.'

During the rest of that journey home I continued to write thumbnail sketches of people and things, oscillating between humility and hope as I realised that, while I might possibly succeed in acquiring a large vocabulary and a polished style, I never would be able to create a plot or write a novel full of living characters such as those of Victor Hugo, Dickens, Thackeray, Balzac and Tolstoi. Then again I would remind myself that in a writer nothing is so important as faithfulness to his own vision and that while a mountain is

endowed with beauty so is a pebble also. I went on round the world collecting my pebbles.

There was time for pondering on all these things as we steamed from Auckland to Vancouver in S.S. Tahiti, a vessel which had a reputation throughout the Pacific of being an incurably rolling old tub; worse even than the rolling was the stuffiness and heat. I had a single-berth inner cabin on one of the lower decks and in those days ventilation had not been perfected. The effort of dressing each morning was a misery, I would put on one garment and then lie down exhausted; then another garment, proceeding painfully and sketchily with the rest of my morning toilette and finally stagger up to the blessed air in a limp condition. There were glimpses of strange beauty in those South Sea islands, though our landings were all too brief as we rolled slowly north-eastward.

There was the aquarium in Honolulu and its never-to-be-forgotten fishes with their brilliant stripes and spots and bands. There was a hillside on that island leading up to the pass, and the whole slope was bathed in a mist-blue haze and when we drew near we saw that the colour emanated from the prickly leafage of many thousand pineapples. One morning, after several monotonous days at sea, we saw on the horizon a line of white sand almost level with the water, gradually becoming longer as we approached it, until it seemed to occupy nearly half of our semi-circular forward horizon. Groups of us clustered in the bows, gazing at that line of sea-washed, glittering white sand, until at last we could discern a strip of green vegetation beyond the beach. Gannets and frigate birds were hovering about that uninhabited island. When at last we came close in we could look over the beach into a nearly land-locked lagoon with an enclosing line of sand on the far side. The water within was, in colour, something out of this world, it was like an opal with here and there a line of the palest green and its surface was still as ice. We ran close in shore until we could see the breakers on the far bank and the backwash of them.

The colour of the lagoon within the atoll seemed to have taken all the colour out of the ocean which had been blue but had now become a dead steel-grey. We gazed on that coral island with a

'Look-thy-last-on-all-things-lovely' emotion, wondering if we should ever see such a thing again.

So we came to Vancouver and to a land in the grip of winter with a terrifying stillness. Next day, as I began the long C.P.R. journey to the Atlantic, I looked out on a frozen country, not glittering with the whiteness of ice and snow, for there was no sunshine to invest objects with colour and one had the impression of moving onward through a grey land that was frozen black.

The first day of that rail journey I spent either sitting on a camp-stool in the Observation Car at the back of the train, or, when the open air became too cold, observing the new country from a movable armchair with triple windows for protection. It was like a moving picture show, the river Fraser foaming below us as we wound up gorges, the gold-hunters' forsaken trail running between our line and the river, rows of straight-limbed firs on every hill, snow-clad mountain crests overhead, black waiters talking like English gentlemen, cheerful tone of the engine bell at stations, few settlements, some Indian huts, a cold and lonely land, the frozen lakes wearing a petrified look as if their waters never had known movement, and all the time a colourless grey sky over a sleeping world.

I stopped the night at Field, in order not to miss the sight of the Rocky mountains just ahead of that spectacular pass. I got out of the train after dark, stumbled along the frozen platform and followed a boy across a square that was deep in snow to a primitive shanty called a 'Boarding-House'. There were no carpets, the bedroom held only a bed, a chest of drawers, a nearly red hot pipe from floor to ceiling and a radiator. 'No window in Canada opens at the top,' observed the landlady as she watched my efforts to admit air and she grudgingly opened the window at the bottom, pushing in an old sliver of wood. She came in her nightgown to call me at 6 a.m. and took the precaution of getting my payment, one dollar, before she retired to bed again. There were three things that I shall always remember about dawn at Field; porridge, a crick in the neck and sunrise.

Field is surely one of the most beautiful spots on the main line

through the Rockies. It stands in a pass some 4,000 feet above sea level. I got breakfast at the station buffet and when they brought the milk for the porridge it was full of tinkling icicles that gave it the most ethereal and pure flavour. As I stood waiting for the train I looked up towards the snow-clad peaks towering above on either side but I could not see their summits, they were so high and sheer that I had to crick my neck backwards over first one shoulder and then the other in order to see the tops; it was in that painful position that I came to realise the height of the Rockies. They were like gigantic shears upended with the blades nearly meeting and I felt as if those blades were just about to close on me.

It was hardly daylight when we drew out from Field into a wider space whence we could look down into a valley of fir trees that were almost black by contrast to the prevailing snow and we could also look across an intervening space on either side up to the peaks where every angle was softened by snow. There was no colour in the world, there was only black and white, and from the Observation Car one could feel the cold like an inimical presence.

Suddenly, far ahead of our train and behind and above, all the peaks were touched with light. From behind the ranges that hemmed us in like a double zig-zag wall, the sun had lit those summits with a dawn glow. There are no words that could describe the colour of that glow, it was neither orange, rose, flame nor gold, it was pure radiance. There should be a new colour name for that unearthly radiance of the dawn, touching gently, as if it brought a benediction, those inaccessible-looking peaks. Even as I watched the glow, it changed and hardened; a new day was born.

Between Vancouver and Quebec there was no such remarkable encounter as that with the butterfly lady in New Zealand but every now and then, in casual talk with a stranger, I would experience one of those moments that bring glimpses into the heart of another human life, moments that are often more significant to the traveller than much study of objects named in guide-books. There was, for instance, the Travellers' Aid lady whom I met at a busy railway station. I soon felt that I knew more about her life and character than I knew about many of my friends and neigh-

bours of long standing; for while it is certain that familiarity can breed contempt, it is equally certain that it may sometimes blur insight. Yet I had only three minutes talk with that much harassed lady. She was continually meeting trains. Her eyes were goggling from long search for lonely females and she was bitterly tired of crowds. She met with all sorts and conditions and found the work intensely interesting, in fact one side of her was absorbed in it with the enjoyment of faculties used at full strength. On the other hand she was blinking with weary eyes that had faced the kaleidoscopic life at a railway station too long. She would sell her soul, she assured me, to be sitting peacefully in a green field.

Then there was the waiter. I talked to him, or rather listened to him for just as long as it took me to eat two poached eggs and two boiled potatoes; I heard about his activities in France during the war and how the only time he ever felt afraid was one night in the trenches when he captured a German in the dark; also about his big game shooting tour in Africa; and finally of his present life, with two days on the train in his white waistcoat, bowing to passengers with 'No Sirs' and 'Yes Madams' and holding out menu cards, and checking bills; then a day at home in Montreal letting off steam. This he would do by riding furiously, anything in the way of horse-flesh that he could beg, borrow or hire.

It would be foolish, I thought, to cross Canada and return home without having seen Niagara, so I stopped off a night at Toronto and took a train to Victoria Park station. As I stepped out into ten inches of snow, such a roar met my ears as I had never heard before. The Falls were ten minutes walk distant but that roar did not seem to come from any one direction, it was circumambient, it filled the whole world, it enclosed me and I felt as if I should never be able to speak nor listen again. Sound had taken possession of me, body and soul, and by the time I had reached the cataract I was hardly capable of registering impressions. In any case the great fall was so unreal that it was anti-climatic. I could not understand the immobility of that monster; always the crest of a wave appeared in just the same place, the tawny billows foamed and roared but they never changed their outline, they were like something bewitched.

There is no rest for Niagara as there is rest for the waves of the sea when they break and die away on shore.

During the Atlantic voyage in the 'Empress of France' I learned that misery is only a matter of degrees, dependent largely on the immediate past. The first night it was misery to lie in an inside cabin without a port-hole but at least I knew that a port-hole in the alley-way was open. Then came a night with every port-hole shut on our side. I woke up feeling as if I were breathing oil and welcomed the smell of soap-suds when stewards washed down the alley at 4 a.m. It was at least a clean smell of known origin. Perhaps any misery can be deadened by custom. However that voyage came to an end like all other nightmares and here is my last entry in the round-the-world diary.

'I came home yesterday from the Antipodes, landing at Liverpool. Have been longing to tell everyone about those wonderful Rocky mountains under snow and about the South Sea islands and all the countries I have seen but no one wants to listen, so I have to ask with eager interest for home news and I am told that the cook's mother has influenza. Further there has been an attempted burglary in the village, and the descriptions of this event, first-hand, second-hand and third, are material for an epic. Here they have not moved, cannot move, do not wish to move, but when events come to them, especially one such as this, what a welcome it finds! No detail is lost, each one is chewed like a cud over and over again. There is, I feel, a kind of superiority in the air. They have not had to go out into the world to seek experience; mine can hardly be so interesting, being self-sought, long pursued, only captured after many wanderings.

So when I have listened as long as it is really necessary to listen, I turn back to my pen and my note-books. And my thoughts.'

CHAPTER 14

: NINE YEARS :

Nine years of thought, activity and journeying, with only one chapter left for bringing my vessel into safe harbour. What a commentary on the relativity of Time! Indeed how futile is the attempt to enclose any life story of many days and years within the covers of a book; yet of making biographies and autobiographies there is no end.

On the other hand how satisfying is the work of a sculptor who spends himself in eliminating the unessential, always drawing nearer to that which he is seeking, secret beauty in the heart of stone; and the writer is but a sculptor working with words instead of marble.

Those nine years were spent in finding or making new friends who became woven into the tissue of life, friends of a moment or friends of a day, each with their own importance in the pattern; in 'voyaging through strange seas of thought alone' among books and people; and in writing, always writing, in season and out, in bed, among solitary woods and mountains and, better still, in my bath or in some crowded café; and last but not least in travel.

The full story of friendships must remain untold, though perhaps in this chronicle of my search for Roots and Stars the form of a friend has hovered now and then with a luminous quality in the background of more pushful objects that clutter every day life. The thoughts gathered in those strange seas of thought never shed more than that of a will-o'-the-wisp light on my road towards old age and death. The countries in which I travelled were Austria, Italy, the Greek islands and Greece, Northern Africa, Yugo-Slavia which was at that time Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Canada, Alaska and Ireland. As for writing, during all those years of self-discipline in reading, and of unrelenting attempts to catch now a thought and now a feeling on the wing to preserve it in human language, my

power over words matured but very slowly. Never could I achieve a rounded story nor even a reasoned essay.

In the middle of those nine years when John Lane accepted my first book *Cornish Silhouettes* I stared at his letter in disbelief, feeling like a Marathon runner who awakes from a state of partial coma to find himself at the goal. 'The Bodley Head, The Bodley Head,' I kept on murmuring to myself and the wonder of that phrase was only heightened when I went to see John Lane in London and found myself sitting in his little den of an office in the Albany, with its fascinating aroma of antiquity and books.

In this, my first interview with a publisher, I confidently expected him to emit epigrams, or at any rate to speak with Johnsonian phrases about style but he did not even mention books. After he had made a few pleasant remarks concerning the *Silhouettes* he began to question me about certain old families in Devon and Cornwall. He had, apparently, a hereditary interest in the West Country and I realised that he must have accepted my book in spite of its slightness because he recognized in it a genuine local atmosphere. A few days later I went to tea with him and his wife in their home somewhere near Westbourne Grove but all I can remember of that tea-party was a room very full of objects and the wife clad in a half-length flowered kimono over her other garments and John Lane, that kind and friendly little man with a clipped white beard, asking me more and more questions about the County Families of the West.

I could hardly realise, when the book came out, that the beginning of my dream had come true; I was an accepted writer. Yet I knew that the end of the dream, the production of a masterpiece, was remote. Moreover in the dream there had been none of the unpleasant reactions inseparable from seeing your own intimate thoughts fossilized in cold print and now become the property of strangers. At first you go about with a song in your heart, indifferent to all other concerns. 'I couldn't care less,' you say to yourself when daily worries recur, 'I have published a book.' All too soon you are forced to care. One after another some mere acquaintance will try to break down your detachment with a remark that probes with

unwonted intimacy a thought or feeling that you have expressed in your book. You begin to realise that it is as if you had thrown a succession of small bombs and must await the imminent impact.

I had never guessed there could be such a gulf between my own ideas and emotions, working in me like yeast and demanding expression in words and those same ideas and emotions imprisoned in the irrevocable pages of a book that had become the common property of every Tom, Dick and Harry. Sometimes, even after the lapse of many months, I would re-read a passage and would feel a cold shiver running down my spine as if I had undressed in public. However my course was set and I could not now go back.

Always, everywhere, I was accompanied by the urge to express in words the best things that happened to me and sometimes also the worst things, the urge to prolong and embody any experience that touched me to the quick, to catch hold of that Protean thing which we call Life.

When I duly gave my mother a copy of the *Silhouettes* she flipped over the pages quickly and lit on the word 'Damn'. It was only used once in the book and incidentally it was put into the mouth of a camouflaged cousin of hers but luckily she had not recognised him. 'Pray,' she said, and I heard with foreboding this ominous word which was always the prelude to some sarcastic question, 'is all the rest of the book like this?'

On the other hand, when a pleasant review appeared in *Punch*, ending with the sentence : 'Modesty is not the only good quality of this attractive writer,' she flung the magazine into a corner and said, in a mocking tone, 'It's *not* true'. However she returned from the local town that very day with six copies of *Punch* which she posted to my father's old friends in Queensland. My mother never had encouraged conceit in her offspring and I knew that she felt it was not an honour but a misfortune to have a daughter who had written a book, but she always faced any trouble gallantly and she was an artist in her ability to cash in on misfortune.

As for the superficial reactions of readers, a few neighbours recognized their own portraits all too readily, often indeed they recognized themselves when no portraiture had been intended. For

instance I had described someone who wore pearls as large as wrens' eggs and it now appeared that there were two ladies in the village who adorned themselves with such jewels of those dimensions, so I made two enemies instead of one. Yet there were people who assured me that they would rather appear in a book as slightly unpleasant characters than not appear at all. Truly the local responses to my little book were unexpected and unpredictable.

It was only after I had seen many of my books published that I could achieve enough detachment to take up the last one, a few months after its appearance, and read it with a critical mind, seizing a pencil to cut out here and there a redundant phrase or to replace a weak word with a strong one, appreciating this or that passage, yawning over others, sometimes even laughing at my own humour.

Gradually I evolved a series of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' for a writer, directed at myself, for after all he is a presumptuous person who will dare to say 'Do' or 'Don't' to any fellow-man.

To begin with, I said to myself, you must write with the heart's blood of your own growth, whether you are describing a great thing or a small one; you must learn to live in those moments of deeper vision when you find yourself looking through and beyond familiar things instead of at their façades, and if you cannot then and there write about such moments you must store them in your mind and perhaps after many days, or even after many years, the door of memory will swing back and you will recapture the vision and will enshrine it in words. You must keep in mind always the value of that kind of writing which speaks to the reader as if 't were a human voice, but this likeness you never can attain by will-power, nor by knowledge amassed and retained. This kind of eloquence will come and go, you cannot find nor force it by endeavour, you can only try to play your individual part in the pageant of our beautiful world with detachment, like a mole a pebble or a dandelion. It may happen that study of one snail in your garden will be more productive of good writing than all the travels of such people as a certain American who finished 'doing Europe' at the North Cape after five weeks travel.

'Have you kept a diary?' I asked him casually. 'Oh no,' he said, 'I've seen too much. I've got the skedule they made out for me in the beginning and that tells me what places I've been to and I buy picture post-cards to show my friends.'

The wind of the spirit bloweth where it listeth and all the routine concerns of each day conspire to overpower that still small voice and what can the writer do about it? You cannot seize upon that sound with outstretched hands, be you never so fervent and determined. Yet sometimes the curl of a wave, a smile on a face, the sight of a coloured butterfly alighted on a purple flower head, a certain stillness of the listening world at dawn or sunset in some lonely place, a word spoken that is echo of your own unspoken, thought, any one of these may be prelude to a moment of vision, to the awakening of that feeling which goes so much deeper and reaches so much further than the knowledge of mere facts.

You must also preserve faithfulness to nature and see to it that your comic figures shall not become wholly grotesque nor your saintly ones lay figures of ice and marble. Always you must remain alert and humble; then, sometimes, you will catch a beam from the light of splendour that may perchance fall on common things, or you may see heaven opened to display its own light behind the clouds.

Among the travels of those nine years there were two countries in which, day after day, I was conscious of that splendour and dazzled by that light. At the time of course I did not think of such experience as 'splendour falling' or 'light displayed'. I merely said to one of my cousins in Wild Wales or to my companion in Alaska: 'This is life as it should be lived'. Sometimes I feel now that one never does taste the full flavour of any deep experience except in retrospect.

Year after year in the summer my cousins and I travelled by horse-drawn caravan in the mountain country between Radnorshire and Snowdon, camping in fields beside a river, sleeping in the van or in a tent or even in the open, free as birds, unkempt as gipsies. During those journeys the whole rhythm of our life was changed; we had left the grey world of routine for the golden world of adventure and

although we had many, misadventures, each one was a source of laughter and delight. We skimmed the cream of each casual encounter and because we had no fixed abiding-place we felt that the whole wide world was our own. Sometimes at night, lying in a field under the stars, I could hear the pulse of the great world beating quietly. We achieved complete detachment from the bondage of self-consciousness. From the dashboard we would how like queens to strangers in doorways; or we would sing lustily in villages, my elder cousin always shrilling into descant above our treble and alto; or, like cads we would shout and wave at snobs who overtook us in cars. Every occupant of a car was, we felt sure, an incurable snob. The whole country was our own, every mountain was a benign companion.

As for that journey to Alaska, of which I have written fully in *Arctic Adventure*, it was not only the most formidable enterprise but also, in a spiritual sense, the high peak of my life.

It certainly brought us both, my companion and myself, face to face with scenes of unutterable beauty and left us with a memory of unutterable peace. The high light of the expedition was the time, three days if I remember rightly but while it lasted it seemed like an eternity of bliss, when we two paddled or drifted alone down the Porcupine river in the light of the midnight sun. After crossing the divide with us, our Indian guides had returned home. The Rat river difficulties were now all behind us and the next stage of our canoe journey to Fort Yukon, for which we planned to find a single Indian guide at Old Crow, promised enough adventure to keep us alert and happy. The water of the Porcupine was a burnished gold and the silence reached out to the North Pole. We were solitary as Adam and Eve as we travelled down river in a kind of awed contentment that is surely a very rare experience.

That journey was made at an age when I still thought that one had to go forth with a stout heart and active limbs and eager hands in order to attain any measure of full life. I had not learned that neither Time nor Space can set any limit to real adventure, nor did I understand that things seen and acts accomplished and distance run may be as effectively a bar to the best adventures as amassing

riches may be to attaining Heaven. Nor is this merely the wishful thinking of old age, though it may be a lesson learned only in maturity when physical activity, seen in its relation to the whole of human life, has become but a means to the great adventures of deeper thought and wider understanding.

Looking back on life I am still uncertain whether it usually happens that new events bring new wisdom or that new wisdom will precede, by a false dawn as it were, the events which must put it to the test. The fact remains that I gained, either when planning or when making that Alaskan journey, a new reassessment of values which paved the way for the strange thing that happened next.

I met, after all those years, the elderly Colonel who had entertained us in Rouen. Then we met again. And again. And again. Before I was aware of what was happening I realised that he had become so important that further travel to remote parts of the globe was not to be thought of because it would preclude me from remaining near him. I must put all my savings, I decided, not into the next journey but into buying a little car so that I could go and see him often. So it happened that when it came, as it very soon did, to the actual step of engagement and then marriage, whereas my friends all prophesied disaster, I never had one doubt nor qualm. I went forward with a feeling of inevitability into the sedentary calm of our married years.

My brother was distressed when I wrote and told him that I was going to marry a man of my father's generation, for he felt sure that my mother's restlessness had driven me to take such a step but when I wrote again and told him that my new home had the peace of Hagnaby, he knew that all was well, for during the years the expression the 'peace of Hagnaby' had become like a proverb to us. And all was well.

The croakers prophesied and croaked. 'A man so much older than herself,' they said, 'it's most unwise. She'll never settle down to that quiet life, she'll never stand that lonely house,' they said. They had to eat their words.

The fact remains that I, the most restless of beings, did settle down, without one backward glance, in the old home from which

my husband never moved and from which he never wished to move. That home would cast its spell on hermit and on wanderer alike, on those who dreamed their dreams and those who thought they could bite down to the core of existence by a career of action and on those who never had any thoughts at all.

There surely never was a house with such a human personality, all who came into contact with it were swung out of their orbit for a while, arrested as if by a spell. Yet in truth it was the Master of the house who cast that spell of peace. He was a man who could charm a stone with a single glance of his blue eyes. He was a man firmly rooted in his own high purpose and always looking to the stars for inspiration.

The strange thing was, in that house, that even after his death the spell persisted.

CHAPTER 15

: SUNRISE ON ITHACA :

Many years had elapsed. I was alone in the world again, still putting forth new roots in this existence that is filled with day after day and year after year experiences of apparent importance and still searching for I knew not what among the stars, magnetized by the mystery of their remoteness.

We were exploring, one spring, some of the less frequented Greek islands; we being one enterprising young companion and myself. We were spending a day and a night at Kathara, in a monastery on the highest mountain of Ithaca, where one Archimandrite lives alone with a married couple, their child and a goatherd. When evening came we were tired, having spent the day on the mountain-side, Oenone taking a sun-bath while I lay in shade cast by the aromatic mountain vegetation, a dwarf holly, or Jerusalem Sage or the elastic-limbed shrub that they call Schiuos.

We were talking to the serving woman as we spread our food on the parlour table; she had no English and we had very little Greek but Oenone and I, each with a conversation book in hand, were trying to ask her to call us at five o'clock, in time to see the sunrise. She watched our dumb-show with enthusiasm. Head and hands upon one shoulder, we were each feigning sleep, then I banged furiously on the parlour door and then both of us, as we raised five fingers in the air, repeated 'Pente, pente'.

'Helios,' she exclaimed with swift intelligence.

'Helios,' I echoed with delight, 'Helios, god of the sun,' and then we all three repeated 'Pente, pente,' to make sure.

The sun was setting behind a group of firs in the monastery garden and I went out to wander once more round the great enclosure which contained a little, but now almost deserted, world of its own; a world of steps and terraces and white cloisters and entrance doors of many rooms and two beautiful mulberry trees and the church and, in a remote corner, the pigsty.

The heavy double doors that guard the church opened at a touch. Inside there was darkness and the scent of incense hung like a weight upon the air and gleaming ikons broke up the shadows although they shed no actual light. High up on the western wall there were small circular windows, blue, gold and green, they hung there like toy balloons, dazzling in colour but shedding no illumination in that dim mysterious building. Suddenly, as I was sitting in a dream-like state of mind on the steps leading to the altar, I became aware that I was not alone. In the darkness by the western wall, below those coloured balloons, there was a form-like an image, seated, but I knew by some sixth sense that it was not an image. It was something alive. I waited until my eyes became accustomed to the darkness and then I recognized the Archimandrite in his ample black gown and circular black cap, the same man who had welcomed us in the morning and given us coffee in his parlour. Now he was seated in a niche, far away, sunk in his evening meditation or in sleep.

Feeling nervous about my own intrusion I rose quietly, stood for a moment in an attitude of apparent reverence before the largest ikon, as a sign of respect for the priest and for the temple, and then stole stealthily away.

The rest of that evening in the half deserted monastery of Kathara was devoted to arrangements for food and sleep in our strange and isolated situation. We examined our two rooms. Each had a bed, a chair, a hand lamp on a table and also an enamel basin beneath a sky-blue tin that was attached to the wall and furnished with a tap that could pass a trickle of water. Our beds each had one small pillow, a pile of blankets rough as goatskin and very damp sheets. The latches of our shutters seemed at first to be immovable and the handles of every door were too loose or too tight. We returned to the parlour and unpacked our bread, oranges and hard-boiled eggs for supper. The friendly woman had filled our empty thermos with sheep's milk and we settled down again with our conversation books, trying to express to her our feelings of gratitude and contentment. We all three were filled with such a sense of understanding and kindness that we wondered why human beings always

use speech as a form of intercourse; looks and gestures are so much less outworn, so much more direct than words. Through an open door beyond the monastery kitchen we had our last glimpse, that evening, of the Archimandrite seated at supper with the two men.

At bed-time after washing we went out through the parlour to the fretted white balcony, carrying our basins, and threw the water down on the pine tree roots. A last golden gleam through the pine needles betokened sunset beyond Cephalonia. I swathed myself in a blanket that was rough as a coarse carpet but was dry. Ocnone slept between damp sheets.

At five a.m., as I rolled out of the stiff blanket, there was enough light to grope about among near objects and the woman was bringing in our thermos of coffee but we left it for the moment and hurried out to the cloisters, through the great outer door of the monastery to a stony slope leading up to the look-out place. This white watch-tower with a spiral staircase is set on a white terrace facing east and can be seen from many points of the island, always appearing to be inaccessibly remote.

We waited on that terrace in the chill air of the false dawn. The bays, headlands and hills of southern Ithaca, the islands beyond open water, all those distant forms were nebulous: the only clear objects were the stones and crouching vegetation near at hand. The silence was almost audible. Suddenly we saw that the slope below our terrace, covered like all the hills of Ithaca with rocks and scrubby bushes, was alive with movement. Two men with a herd of some seventy goats were coming up towards us with a deliberate pace that hardly broke into the stillness of the world; they had emerged without a sound from the mist and dimness of the world below. There was a silver quality in the air; the sea, so remote down there, was apparently spellbound into quietude, it was more silver than blue but streaked here and there as if milky currents were moving beneath the surface.

Islands and hills had now become amorphous waifs, each had a faintly silhouetted skyline but no appearance of solidity, disclosing no single feature of village, church or woodland.

In the east, resting on one mountain skyline, there was an unsub-

stantial bar that might have been a cloud but it was misty rose, unlike the overhead sky that was misty grey. That roseate bar held the only colour visible but it did nothing, as yet, to lighten or awaken the world. We looked down again but neither sound nor ripple came from the level surface of water. We had caught the sea asleep. It was impossible to believe that this quiet water was ever subject to tidal movements, was ever cleaved in two by the prow of a vessel or the arms of a swimmer, had ever reared itself up to break into angry waves. It lay there as if it had been put to sleep by some incantation and we felt like intruders watching its uncanny rest.

Yet in the innermost bay, near Vathy harbour, the water had imperceptibly assumed a dark but lifeless purple. Moreover, very slowly that rose-coloured bar resting on the mountain peaks became more definite, became a little wider and a little longer, became faintly golden, but still it shed no light on the sleeping earth or the sleeping sea.

Then something happened, something dramatic and unexpected, but it was only in my own perception. There was no apparent change in the earth or sea or sky but I was suddenly aware of another dimension beyond Time, beyond Space, for there was depth in that golden bar; and background. There was something behind it, beyond and below, but imminent; a whole world unknown to mortal men; some Thing or Presence, perhaps, for which I had been seeking all my life. I held my breath, half expecting the appearance of a god from that world beyond the mountains but still there was no change in the utter stillness of our sleeping universe, until there came a flash, instantaneous as lightning. A light had been kindled, no bigger than the fire on a domestic hearth, a little concentrated fire resting on the mountain rim in the very heart of that roseate cloud, a fire of pure gold that was penetrating, dazzling, indescribable, transcending in luminous intensity any leaping flames, any molten furnace ever lit by the hands of man. For one second I was looking into the golden glory of the sun. Was I face to face with Apollo himself?

Then that light was extended, grew longer, grew higher, became

a crescent, became a half-moon, an orb. It was not possible, after that one glance, to look into the face of the sun. It was clear of the mountain rim now, shedding a gold path on the sleeping sea, dazzling our eyes, lighting up the islands, the bays and the harbours of southern Ithaca.

All this happened too quickly and whether the sun rose in a matter of seconds or moments I shall never know, for Time was annihilated.

Indeed the whole experience of that day and night and dawn at Kathaká was too short. Our minds were over-active in registering new surface impressions; deeper thoughts and feelings were overlaid. Only later by a reflex action could I begin to grasp the significance of that dawn, wherein, with a single flash, I had experienced a full sense of infinity, moving back, or forward, or both, to where Time was non-existent; caught up into a world where strife, ugliness and hatred played no part, where love and happiness and beauty reigned supreme.

On that mountain top in Greece the rhythm of night and day was unbroken and afterwards many things that I had noticed in the island took their place in the pattern of a newly-realised immensity. For hundreds of years the goatherds of Greece, like those men whom we had seen coming up the hillside with the dignity of Kings, had risen at dawn and gone to rest with the sun. For hundreds of years the people of the island had known, in spite of hardship, poverty and wars, that happiness may be found in the little things of here and now, attuning themselves through night and day, through growth and harvest, to the movements of the great Earth.

A tiny cup of coffee, a spoonful of glycos made from oranges or cherries, a handful of sea-urchins fresh from salt water, these can bring perfection to a meal. No one would wantonly lose an hour or a minute by hastening on to the next one. The beauty of silver-leaved olive trees outlined on the kingfisher-blue sea is perfection for a day, and for a lifetime of days. There is beauty everywhere; in the rippled mountain rims cut out against the sky; in the black olive-tree stems, twisted and very ancient; in the scent of orange

: Sunrise on Ithaca :

blossom and the taste of oranges and olives and lemons; in each dark green cypress pointing like a monolith to heaven.

There is simplicity. The people of Ithaca have joy in the work of their own hands. Something of the ancient Greek spirit survives; one is not aware in Ithaca of hustle, nor excess, nor the tyranny of time. Fishermen mending their nets sit on beaches hour after hour, the nets are coloured like the rosy-fingered dawn of Homer, they are held at arms' length, hitched into the naked toes of the menders. There are fishermen in boats going to and fro with the tides. There are women on mountain paths, bearing burdens on their heads, moving with the upright walk of Queens; and women twirling the distaff to make woollen thread, as they stand in doorways. Later in the year old and young will gather in the olives and will harvest grapes for wine. These people, though full of cheerful curiosity about men and things, are not tormented by the delirium of desire to 'save time'. They have all the time that there is.

In that moment of sunrise I had a swift, flash-lighted vision of all these things and many others. Yet what I treasure most about that experience of dawn in Ithaca is an overwhelming sense of our beautiful Earth as one great being, a living creature, a god it may be, remote from men who work like ants and fight like demons and run to and fro in turmoil. Too often we take for granted Earth's magnificent, unchanging rhythm of dawn and sunset, darkness and light; that rhythm is the same in the days of Genghis Khan and in those of Winston Churchill, in the eras of cave-man and space-man alike. It is untouched by peace or war, indifferent to sects or dynasties.

In that all-too-brief experience I had been behind the scenes in this pageant of the Earth that we sometimes regard with casual or incurious glance and had felt that unity of light and darkness, activity and repose, birth which is but an end and death which is but a beginning.

Later, when I told D. about that sunrise in Ithaca, she said that I must have been given a glimpse of some cosmic reality that is indescribable.

'It was like an illumination,' I said, 'lasting for one split second,

: Roots and Stars :

revealing a new rhythm. Why cannot one live always now in tune with that rhythm?

‘Why, oh why’ she said and her words seemed like an echo from some unseen Presence that, in all our years of seeking, had eluded us.